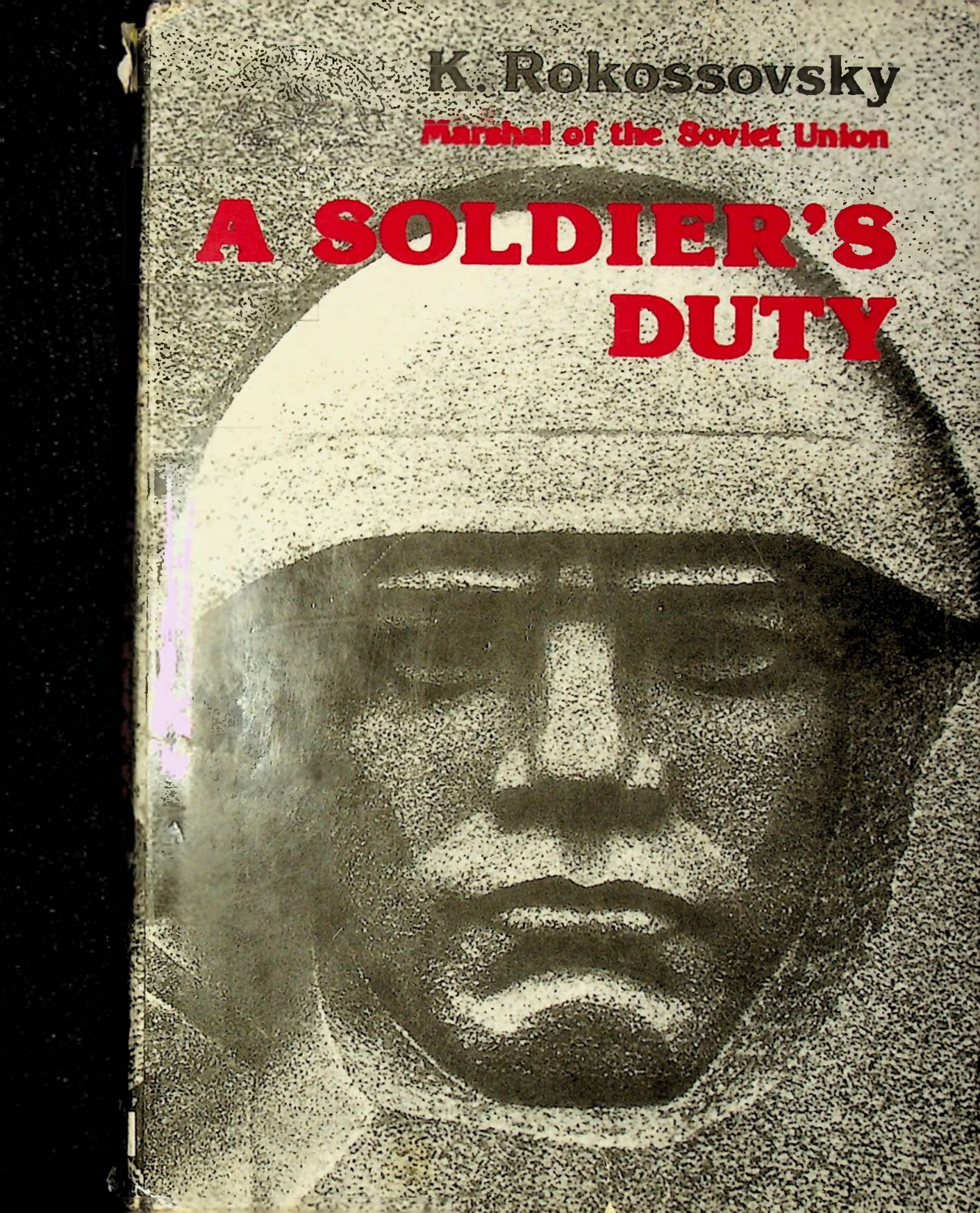
K. Rokossovsky
Marshal of the Soviet Union
A SOLDIER'S DUTY

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WAR TOMORROW

In the spring of 1940, after a holiday with my family in Sochi, on the Black Sea coast, I had an invitation from Marshal Semyon Timoshenko. The People's Commissar of Defence received me warmly.

Seeing him again like this took me back to the early thirties and Timoshenko's 3rd Cavalry Corps in which I had commanded the 7th Samara Cavalry Division named in honour of the British proletariat. Our corps commander had enjoyed the respect—more, the love—of all his men, and now, in his present high position, he retained his old simplicity of manner and friendly accessibility.

Marshal Timoshenko suggested that I resume command of the 5th Cavalry Corps, which I had commanded in 1936-37. The corps was on its way to the Ukraine, and in the meantime I was to be at the disposal of General Georgi Zhukov, then Commander of the Kiev Military District. Timoshenko telephoned General Zhukov then and there and told him of my appointment.

I was appointed to a team of generals working directly under the District Commander. We spent most of our time with the troops. General Zhukov's assignments were extremely interesting, and I was able to assess the strong and weak points of our troops. However, we did not work together for long at the time. Soon Zhukov left for Moscow, where he was appointed Chief of the General Staff, while I assumed command of my corps.

Towards the end of 1940, I received a new appointment. I was sent to command the 9th Mechanised Corps, which, however, was still to be activated. This came as a complete surprise. After all, I had been a cavalryman for twenty-seven years. My service had begun with the 5th Kargopol Dragoon Regiment of the old Russian Army in August 1914. I had been in the cavalry all through World War I, and after the October Revolution of 1917 I continued serving in the Red Army cavalry.

In short, the cavalry was my element, I had a fond affection for it and I had passed through a fine school, both in combat and in peacetime. In the cavalry I had climbed the ladder of command from squadron commander to corps commander. I had a good idea of the peculiar temperament of cavalry officers and this gave me confidence in my work.

It was only natural that I had my apprehensions when taking up service in a new arm. Would I cope with the duties of a corps commander in mechanised troops? On the other hand, I was inspired by the trust shown in me and, besides, I had for some time been interested in the development of armour which, I thought, had a promising future. All in all, I was in the highest of spirits and, mindful of the saying that "it doesn't take gods to make pots", I got down to my new job with a will, realising that the corps would have to be activated as quickly as possible.

Mounted troops had begun to lose their importance even in the First World War, when mass armies with automatic weapons (machine-guns) supported by rapid-fire artillery, tanks and aircraft, took the field and were deployed along continuous front lines. With troops dug into the ground and protected by barbed wire, no successful cavalry operations in mounted formation were possible, and cavalry units joined the infantry in the trenches, with the horses becoming primarily a means of transport. The Civil War in Russia brought about a short-lived revival of the cavalry due to special circumstances, primarily the absence of continuous front lines on the battlefields. Being the most mobile arm, the cavalry was in a key position. In addition, there were still comparatively large reserves of horses in the country. There were also trained cavalry troops. The Communist Party's slogan, "Proletarians, join the cavalry", was quickly put into effect, and the Red Cavalry contributed substantially to the defeat of the white-guard counter-revolutionaries and the foreign interventionists.

In the years following the Civil War the nation worked to carry out the Party's slogan of overtaking the leading capitalist states in industrial development. The five-year plans provided the means for equipping the army with modern weapons. Military thinking also developed, and our military science forged far ahead as compared with Europe, America and Japan. Among the theories fashionable in the West were those of Douhet and Fuller. The former

dealt in terms of an all-conquering air force which, it was claimed, could decide the outcome of a war by itself; the other spoke of the boundless opportunities of armoured troops. Our military leaders gave each arm—armour, air force, artillery, infantry—its due, laying stress on the co-ordination of all arms as formulated in the so-called "fighting in depth tactics", the development of which is associated with the name of V. K. Triandofillov.

Of course, there were diehard cavalrymen who retained their old enthusiasm for the cavalry, but they carried no weight. In fact, the first armoured units were formed actually to replace cavalry units.

By the second half of the thirties, our Armed Forces already had quite a few activated strategical mechanised corps.

The organisation of the Red Army and the combat readiness of the troops were completely suited to the tasks confronting an army of a socialist state. It was well staffed with proficient command personnel at all levels. Besides, most of the commanders and political officers had combat experience obtained in World War I and the Civil War. Our Armed Forces were capable of dealing any enemy who might venture to attack us a smashing blow.

It is true that in the late thirties some serious blunders were made. Our regular army personnel also suffered, and this could not but have a detrimental effect on our army organisation and troop training.

Nazi Germany's attack against Poland and the swiftness with which the Polish forces were overrun, despite the courage of the majority of the officers and men, and the even more tragic outcome of the war in France, confirmed the advantages Germany had gained in creating powerful armoured and mechanised troops and an effective air force.

From then on our army proceeded to build up mechanised corps with renewed vigour while at the same time substantially trimming down the cavalry. It was certainly gratifying to see that correct views had at long last triumphed and we were again setting up the large armoured and mechanised units so essential for defence and victory in modern warfare. These organisational measures were at their height when my turn came and, bidding farewell to the cavalry, I turned tankman.

The 9th Mechanised Corps comprised three divisions: the 131st Motorised Infantry under Colonel N. V. Kalinin,

the 35th Tank under Major-General N. A. Novikov, and the 20th Tank under Colonel M. Y. Katukov (owing to his illness, in the very first days of the war it was his deputy, Colonel V. M. Chernyaev, who led the 20th into combat). The corps was directly subordinated to the Kiev Military District.

Our guiding consideration was simple enough: the faster we built up the corps to combat strength the better would we perform our duty to the nation and the Party. As the majority of the recruits were raw indeed, we launched a comprehensive combat training programme in all units and elements and the corps as a whole while activation was still under way. As corps commander, I was fortunate to have as my assistants educated and devoted soldiers who knew how to teach officers and men what they would need to know in war. I should like to single out my Chief of Staff, Alexei Maslov, a thirty-nine-year-old major-general. He was, in army parlance, an "academician" (that is, a graduate of the Frunze Academy). He managed the corps headquarters with a firm hand, and devoted himself completely to the training of the lower-echelon headquarters, fostering discipline and teaching them the importance of independent thinking. I liked his style, which combined high standards, a tactful appreciation of the view and initiative of his subordinates, and a compelling urge to be with the troops as much as possible. I was also greatly assisted in preparing the corps for coming trials by my deputy for technical service, Colonel Vnukov, and my deputy for political affairs Kamenev.

There was no time to lose. Nazi Germany, flushed with her successes in the West, had now turned to the Balkans, where she was overrunning one country after another. We in the army felt that the time was approaching when our country, whether we liked it or not, would also be drawn into the maelstrom of the war. In our off-duty discussions we, the senior officers of the corps, found ourselves constantly debating our country's international position. We were in an uneasy mood.

To tell the truth, none of us believed that Germany would honour her treaty with the Soviet Union for long and we were sure that sooner or later she would attack us. However, the treaty gave us the time we needed so much to build up our defences and foiled the imperialists' hopes of creating a united anti-Soviet front.

How long the "reprieve" would last was not for us to know at our corps level. However, we lost no time, concentrating our attention in the first place on officer and staff training. We held field command and staff exercises with means of communication and symbolic forces, war games on maps, and went on field inspection along the routes that the corps was to take in the event of a sudden outbreak of hostilities. All officers were instructed to ensure the daily combat readiness of their units regardless of their strength.

As the reader will see later on, I was not to be in command of the 9th Mechanised Corps for long in the war, but I remain forever grateful to its officers for displaying such an understanding of their commander and for their profound realisation of the importance of our preparations, which were prompted by the expectation of an early war. Those days were not wasted, and they yielded good fruit in June 1941. For my part, the main thing in my system of command personnel training was the rule to foster in each and every officer an aptitude for independent, resolute and bold action. Only when he possesses these qualities can an officer hope to rise to the demands imposed by fighting in the field.

We pursued this objective day by day, with full confidence in our officers, who responded with selfless devotion and understanding. We had created an atmosphere of watchful expectation, and we strove to maintain it. I knew that other corps, too, were hastily and anxiously preparing for any eventuality.

In May 1941, General M. P. Kirponos, who had taken over the Kiev Military District from Zhukov, ordered a field inspection on an army group scale. Our corps also participated, co-operating with the 5th Field Army in the Rovno-Lutsk-Kovel sector. We had placed considerable hopes in this exercise, which, however, were not justified. Kirponos's analysis was extremely superficial, so much so that we could scarcely make out what had actually been expected of us.

Soon there followed an order from District HQ which was quite at variance with the general situation and the approaching threat of an enemy invasion: the troops were instructed to dispatch their artillery to practice grounds in the frontier zone. Our corps managed to retain its artillery. We showed that we could carry out the exercises in our home area. Subsequently this proved to be our salvation.

During the field inspection I had a good look at the sectors of the frontier zone on the corps' potential opera-

tional directions, as well as other sectors. Construction of the fortified area was only just commencing.

I did not go into the aspects of high policy then, and shall not do so now; I speak as a commander who by 1941 had accumulated a body of practical combat experience and knowledge in tactics and strategy.

Even the meagre information I could obtain from various sources was sufficient to draw certain conclusions from the actions of German troops in Poland and France. The Germans had copied our fighting in depth tactics *in toto*. In the offensive armoured and mechanised troops and bomber aircraft had played a leading part; the main forces had been gathered into a mailed fist designed to rout the enemy as quickly as possible; powerful wedges had been driven in swiftly along converging directions. Special importance had been attached to achieving surprise.

We should have to keep our powder dry.

I could not help recalling my service in the Far Eastern Maritime and Transbaikal regions in 1921-35. Then, at the slightest indication of activity and troop movement across the border, our troops were alerted and were always ready to give a fit response to any sallies from our "neighbour". All elements in the frontier zone were kept in constant combat readiness. We had a clearcut battle protection and deployment plan, which was altered every time the general situation on the given theatre changed.

As I saw it, this was what the Kiev Military District lacked.

During the District field exercises I discussed the situation with some of the higher officers, notably Generals I. I. Fedyuninsky, S. M. Kondrusev and F. V. Kamkov (infantry, mechanised and cavalry corps commanders, respectively), and they too shared my view that we were on the eve of a war with Hitler Germany. I spent a night in Kovel with General Fedyuninsky, who proved to be a hospitable host. Our conversation was again on the same theme: too much of a happy-go-lucky attitude in some quarters. We agreed on co-operation between our units and reviewed all that had to be done so as not to be caught napping when the time for battle came.

We did everything within the limits of our possibilities and rights, starting with regular control over the preparation of mobilisation documents. In particular, we drew up a check list of civilian motor transport assigned to the corps.

The civilians showed little concern for this and, running ahead, I can say that in the turmoil of June 22 in the frontier zone, the 9th Mechanised Corps did not receive a single lorry of those assigned to it by the mobilisation plan; mobilisation, incidentally, was announced only when the corps was already taking the field.

Most alarming of all, May had ended and June begun, yet we were still extremely short of materiel. Our training machines were the worse for wear, the engines were at the end of their tether. I had to restrict the use of tanks for training purposes for fear that we would find ourselves at war with no tanks to fight in.

On June 21, I was holding an analysis of a night command-and-staff exercise of the corps. Afterwards, I invited the division commanders to go fishing at dawn on the next day, Sunday. That evening, however, someone on our staff received a report from the frontier forces that a deserter had crossed over at a frontier post: a Pole serving in the German Army, who declared that the Germans were preparing to attack the Soviet Union on June 22.

I decided to cancel our fishing trip, called up the division commanders and told them of the report. We discussed it at corps headquarters and decided to alert the troops.

BEGINNING OF HOSTILITIES

About 4 a.m. on June 22, the duty officer brought me a telephone message from the 5th Army Headquarters telling me to open the top secret operational envelope. According to regulations, we could open it only on orders of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers or the People's Commissar for Defence. This order was undersigned by the Deputy Chief of Operations of the 5th Army. I ordered the duty officer to verify the authenticity of the message at District Headquarters, Army Headquarters and the People's Commissariat for Defence; meanwhile I called for my Chief of Staff, Political Deputy and Special Section Chief.

"I should like to know your opinion, comrades, on the course of action to be taken," I said.

They all expressed doubt, suspecting a provocation of some kind.

The duty officer reported that communications were disrupted and he had been unable to contact either Moscow, Kiev, or Lutsk.

There was nothing to do but to shoulder the responsibility and open the envelope.

The instructions stated: immediately alert the corps and proceed in the direction Rovno-Lutsk-Kovel. It was exactly four o'clock when I ordered the battle alarm to be sounded and asked division commanders Novikov, Kalinin and Chernyaev to report at once at my Observation Post.

While the troops were assembling, I gave the division commanders preliminary instructions on routes and departure times. Corps Headquarters were writing the Order of the Day.

The preparations progressed quickly, calmly and in an orderly manner. Every man knew his place and performed his duties correctly. The only bottleneck was logistic support. We had hardly any lorries, not enough fuel and a limited stock of ammunition. There was no time to wait

for instructions from above as to where and what could be had. Nearby there was a central ammunition dump and the garrison motor depot. I ordered the dump to be opened up, overcoming the quartermasters' resistance by a judicious use of authority, pleading and duly undersigned receipts. I think I signed more receipts that day than in all the rest of my life.

General Maslov had been trying to establish communications up the chain of command since early morning. It was ten o'clock before he finally got through to Lutsk for a few minutes. An Army staff officer hastily told him that the town was being bombed for the second time, that communications were disrupted, and that he knew nothing about the situation at the front.

At about the same time we received information that the Germans had bombed Kiev, then we were cut off again.

We were unable to get in touch with the District Command, to whom we were directly subordinated, and throughout the day of 22nd June did not receive a single order or instruction from them.

At around eleven o'clock up to twenty German bombers passed overhead at a high altitude and were fired upon by our anti-aircraft artillery.

All these events strengthened my conviction that I had acted correctly. This encouraged me, and I concentrated wholly on preparing the troops. Fuel, ammunition, maintenance of law and order in the town, protection of munitions remaining after the troops departed, taking care of officers' families, checking unit readiness, organising meetings of personnel—all this had to be done in a matter of hours. At the same time in all my thoughts I was already out there, in the thick of the fighting.

In the long years of my army service I had seen what war was like, got to know it in the fullest sense of the word, and it was natural that I kept reflecting on how our unseasoned men would look and act when we engaged the enemy.

Here is one small detail which may help the reader of the younger generation to understand the train of thoughts of a corps commander on the first day of so sudden a war. As we were preparing to set out, I ordered the officers and noncoms not to wear khaki collar tabs and insignia. An officer should stand out in battle formation, the men should

be able to see him, and he himself must feel that he is seen and watched, indeed, looked up to.

At 1400 hours, June 22, the corps set out along three routes in the general direction Novograd-Volynsky-Rovno-Lutsk. In accordance with the time schedule, the 131st Motorised Infantry Division under Colonel N. V. Kalinin, a former cavalryman and seasoned commander, moved well ahead along a highway on the right flank. Kalinin had some difficulty in mounting all his men on lorries and tanks, though at the last minute we were able to scrape together a few more lorries for him.

Then followed the 35th Tank Division of Major-General N. A. Novikov, an experienced tankman, with the 20th Tank Division bringing up the rear on the left. We took special pains to organise reconnaissance and security.

From the moment of the alarm and on the march we did not spot a single aircraft of ours in the air. German planes appeared fairly frequently, mainly bombers that passed high above, for some reason without fighter escort. Later we discovered the reason, when we saw our damaged and gutted aircraft so imprudently concentrated on airfields in the frontier zone.

By the start of the war the 9th Mechanised Corps was manned almost to full strength, but we were short of arms and had not completed the training programmes. Still, in the circumstances we were fit for combat.

The bitter fact was that the corps was mechanised only in name, and I gloomily watched our outdated T-26 and BT-5 tanks and few BT-7s roll by, fully realising that they would not last long in combat. I say nothing of the fact that we had only about one-third the number of tanks prescribed by regulations. As for the motorised infantry of the two tank divisions, they had no trucks and not a single cart, not a single horse.

But this was no time for analysis and criticism; we did not succumb to gloom and did our best to build up our forces into a combat unit and organise them so that they could carry out their soldiers' duty to the best of their abilities. Looking back today, it must be said that the General Staff directive did not provide for the eventuality of the corps having to go into action in the middle of the activation stage, when it would be short of materiel and transport. Yet this should have been reckoned with. The directive was for a fully activated mechanised unit provided

with everything necessary to carry out any combat mission.

From the outset events forced us to make certain corrections. The bulk of the corps' troops made a 50-kilometre march on foot on the first day. To this day I see this as a fine example of the endurance and devotion of the Soviet soldier. However, the men were completely exhausted. It was terribly hot and they had had to carry on their backs, in addition to their individual equipment, light and heavy machine-guns, magazines and cartridge belts for them, and also 50- and 82-mm mortars and ammunition.

At night I discussed with Novikov and Chernyaev the results of the first day and decided to reduce the marches to 30-35 kilometres. We drew up a new route formation for our so-called tank divisions, with tanks carrying tank-borne troops and part of the artillery in the first echelon. The group proceeded by bounds from one line to another, separating from the infantry and then waiting for it to catch up. The bulk of the troops and artillery moved in the second echelon in conventional infantry formation.

By the end of the day of June 22, the motorised infantry division, which had the lorries, reached the area of Rovno and halted there after a 100-kilometre march. By then communications between corps headquarters and all units was stable and there was no cause for alarm.

In the morning of June 23, Colonel Kalinin reported that the Army Commander, General M. I. Potapov, had temporarily placed the division under his command and ordered it to advance to the River Styr, assume defensive positions along its eastern bank in the Zhidichi-Lutsk-Mlynov sector by the end of the day, and prevent the Germans from penetrating eastward. This was done over the head of the corps commander.

A vague picture of events in the Lutsk sector could be drawn from reports and other sources. In any case, it was apparent that the enemy had succeeded in breaking through the frontier zone and penetrating deep into our territory.

Throughout June 23 the corps' main forces continued their movement in the same route formation and along the planned routes, having strengthened reconnaissance on the flanks.

As Kalinin was out in front, we decided to move up the Command Post along the route of the 35th Tank Division. Maslov sent a truck-borne engineers platoon ahead, and we

drove forward with the intention of supervising the crossing of the River Goryn, south of Rovno, by General Novikov's troops.

The ferry was unable to take the division across within the scheduled time, and we gave orders that the bridge at the village of Goshcha be used. Then our HQ drove on. Just in case, I took with me a battery of 85-mm guns.

The road passed through a vast field of overgrown grain. Suddenly one of us noticed groups of strangely dressed men diving in and out of the sea of grain—one in an undershirt, another in peasant's clothes and a tattered straw hat. I stopped the car and ordered to round up the strangers and find out what they were doing here. It was thus that we met the first encirclement escapees. They belonged to various units, and among them were the two men from the platoon we had sent ahead to set up the corps CP, whom we questioned first. According to these men, the engineers platoon had suddenly encountered German tanks and motorcyclists, and been attacked and surrounded. Only a few men had escaped, the rest, they alleged, had been killed. The other men we questioned also kept insisting that their units had been routed and annihilated, that they themselves had escaped by sheer chance, shed their uniforms, fearing capture, and were trying to contact Soviet forces. Fear had proved stronger than common sense. The masquerade was of no avail, and subsequently we saw the bodies of men like these shot by the Germans.

Towards the end of the day we had another surprise, though of a different nature. East of Zdolbunovo five German tanks and three truckloads of infantry appeared from a grove some three kilometres away and advanced towards us. The headquarters prepared for battle. The battery deployed, with orders to open direct fire. The Germans spotted us and hastily retreated into the forest. Our gunners, who had been longing to open fire on the enemy, were disappointed.

The CP had to be set up somewhat farther to the north.

It was now important to ascertain the situation so as to be able to go into action after giving the troops a brief rest to recover from the forced marches.

I knew that somewhere ahead or on the flanks there should be the troops of the 19th and 22nd Mechanised Corps of Generals N. V. Feklenko and S. M. Kondrusev. Reconnaissance groups under Corps staff officers were dispatched

to find them. The Corps Chief of Staff went with one of the groups on his motorcycle. We soon established that Kondrusev was moving in the direction of Kovel and his advanced forces had already engaged the enemy north of Lutsk. Feklenko's corps proceeded towards Dubno.

When Maslov returned he reported that he had succeeded in getting briefly in touch with General M. A. Purkayev, Chief of Staff of the Front, who had told him that the corps was being subordinated to the 5th Army and we were to concentrate in the Klevan, Olyka area.

"What did he say about the situation at the front?"

"Nothing. I think he doesn't know much himself...."

Our units continued to move ahead. A disorderly stream of civilian refugees flowed eastwards in the opposite direction along the Lutsk-Rovno highway. German aircraft frequently appeared overhead, bombing troops and refugees alike.

On June 24, the 9th Mechanised Corps reached the concentration area and engaged the enemy.

The 131st Motorised Division threw back the advance enemy troops who had forded the Styr and were fighting on the Lutsk line and southwards, repelling enemy attempts to recross to the eastern bank.

The 35th Tank Division was in action southwest of Klevan against the 13th German Panzer Division.

At dawn on the 24th, the advance regiment of the 20th Tank Division attacked from march column motorised elements of the 13th Panzer Division that had halted in the neighbourhood of Olyka, inflicting heavy casualties and capturing prisoners and much equipment. On that day Colonel Chernyaev demonstrated real military acumen. Having consolidated, his troops all day successfully beat back the attacks of enemy tank units.

The Corps CP was set up in the neighbourhood of Klevan. The following day stubborn defensive fighting continued against tanks and motorised infantry of two German divisions (the 14th and 13th) on the line Lutsk, Olyka, south of Klevan, where the enemy kept attempting to straddle the Rovno-Lutsk road and capture Lutsk. Thanks to the heroism of the men, the courage and skill of the officers, our troops repelled these attempts. Towards evening the fighting subsided: in those days the Germans did not pursue the advance at night. As the sun set they halted for rest, marking the frontline by the fires of burning villages.

On June 26, on orders of the Army Commander Potapov, the corps counterattacked in the Dubno sector, with the 19th Mechanised Corps on the left and General Kondrusev on the right. However, no one was charged with co-ordinating the actions of the three corps. They were committed to action separately, straight from the march, without taking account of the state of the troops, who had been engaging powerful enemy forces for two full days, without taking into account the distance from the potential battlefield.

It was a hectic time, the difficulties were exceptional and surprises awaited us at every turn. Consider such an order from Front HQ: "Deliver a powerful counterblow against the flank of enemy pincer, destroy it and restore the situation." This order showed complete ignorance of the situation on this sector, to say nothing of the overall situation that had developed by June 26 in the Zhitomir, Vladimir-Volynsky and Rovno sectors, where the German troops were delivering their main blow. I had the impression that the Front Commander and his staff were simply repeating verbatim a directive of the General Staff, which could not have been aware of the true situation. The correct thing would have been to shoulder the responsibility and assign the troops tasks in accordance with the situation that had developed by the time the General Staff directive was received.

The corps continued to engage the enemy in heavy fighting, despite steadily mounting pressure as the enemy reinforced the armour and motorised troops already in action with infantry divisions. The attempts to counterattack cost us dear.

We kept losing contact with our neighbours. We managed to find out that the 22nd Mechanised Corps had been attacked by large enemy forces, had suffered losses and been thrown back to the northeast of Lutsk. General Kondrusev had been killed at the outset and the Chief of Staff, V. S. Tamruchi, had assumed command. Our neighbour on the left—the 19th Corps—had been attacked from the Dubno area just as it was about to counterattack and had been thrown back to Rovno, where it was fighting a defensive battle.

That evening the commander of the 22nd Corps' tank division came to us. His arm was bandaged and he was badly upset. The way he made his report compelled me to be sharp with him.

"Stop crying out that the corps has been destroyed!" I exclaimed. "The Twenty-Second is fighting, I've just spoken to Tamruchi. Find your units and join them."

With a group of staff officers I drove to a hight in the combat area of the 20th Tank Division. We saw an endless column of enemy lorries, tanks and artillery moving out of Dubno in the direction of Rovno. From the south fresh columns were approaching our defence sector.

Having very few tanks, all I could do was to rely on artillery. I cannot deny myself the satisfaction of recalling one fine episode in those impossibly hard battles.

We received another order to counterattack but enemy forces were so superior to ours that I took the responsibility of meeting the enemy on the defensive instead of attacking. In those woody and marshy parts the Germans advanced only along the major roads. I ordered Novikov's division to deploy along the Lutsk-Rovno Highway and had the 20th Tank Division with its artillery regiment armed with the latest 85-mm guns transferred from the left flank to reinforce it. The Chief of Staff organised, and Chernyaev quickly and energetically executed the manoeuvre. The guns were set up in road ditches, on heights overlooking the highway, and in the middle of the road for direct fire.

The Germans approached in a large diamond formation: motorcyclists in front, followed by armoured cars and tanks.

We watched the large enemy force bearing down on the 20th, and saw what happened to it. The artillerymen let the Germans come very close before opening fire. A terrific pile-up was left on the highway: motorcycles, wrecked armoured cars, dead bodies. The impetus of the advancing troops presented our guns with new targets.

The enemy suffered great losses and was thrown back. General Novikov exploited Chernyaev's fine success, moved forward and was able to capture the heights we needed.

Colonel Kalinin sent to Corps HQ important information provided by a captured German colonel, who declared, among other things,

"Your artillerymen are superb, your artillery is powerful, and the Russian soldier's morale is high."

We had halted the enemy for quite a long time, by the standards of those days, but it was obvious that such "impudence" would not remain unpunished. Sure enough, Junkers bombers soon appeared in groups of nine, attacking in waves and pounding us mercilessly—though with little

effect. The men took shelter in the woods, guns and tanks were dug into the ground.

I was greatly handicapped by the absence of information concerning the situation at the front. It is not only the rank and file in the field who must have the feeling of support. This feeling, in a broader sense, is just as essential to the higher command of the fighting troops. Without it creative thought is inevitably shackled.

We had only ourselves to rely upon in getting the necessary information. Our staff quickly adapted to what at times seemed an impossible situation. General Maslov ferreted high and low for the information needed to grasp the logic of the events and provide data for troop control. Many staff officers lost their lives carrying out their assignments.

From fragmentary reports we more or less pieced together the events on our sector, but we remained quite ignorant of the situation in other army zones of the Southwestern Front. General Potapov's staff were evidently no better off and all the while I was in command of the 9th Mechanised they were of no help to us whatsoever. More often than not we simply had no contact with them at all.

We got some useful information from the several hundred prisoners taken by our divisions, officers as well as other ranks, and including the colonel captured by Chernyaev's artillerymen with valuable documents and maps on his person.

The situation was very grave. The Germans had concentrated a large striking force and, attacking suddenly, succeeded in penetrating the boundary between our 5th and 6th Armies; armoured and motorised units began pouring into the breach to exploit the initial success and push on as swiftly as possible towards Zhitomir.

The enemy's main effort was directed to the south of us. I feel justly proud of the courage and aptitude displayed by the troops under my command in the Lutsk sector, but, frankly speaking, I would not undertake to say what our performance would have been like had we been in the main line of attack.

Even so, we did not have an easy time. Our tenacity was evidently irritating the German Command and hindering their plans. The 13lst Motorised Division commander reported that enemy infantry and armour had forced back his regiments defending the River Styr line and forded the river along a wide front. Apparently the enemy was build-

ing up forces in our sector, and we could expect a much more powerful panzer strike than before.

The corps' ranks had thinned substantially, but our raw recruits were now seasoned in combat, they had acquired a taste for getting to grips with the enemy and saw for themselves that "we *can* beat the Germans, the same as the Japanese", as a tankman of the 35th Tank Division remarked. (I asked where the Japanese came in, and it turned out he had seen action at Khalkhin-Gol in Mongolia.) In short, though we had fewer men, they were better fighters.

In the course of this heavy fighting we found a new source of manpower: the woods around Klevan were literally swarming with stragglers alone and in groups in search of their units. We collected them and sent them off to our motorised units—actually infantry regiments. Mostly these people were good men who had simply been stunned by the tragic suddenness of events. The strength of the enemy's first surprise strike and his following swift advance so deep into our territory had overwhelmed them, and it was not so easy to overcome the initial shock.

The sight of an organised, fighting combat unit revived them and they became good soldiers again, displaying their mettle in the subsequent fighting. Our political apparatus, the Communists and Komsomols in the units and elements, did much to help people regain confidence, revive their spirits and get rid of the feeling of insecurity that only a short while ago had bred panicky cries of "We're surrounded!" at the sight of a small group of German tanks.

Once in the course of a rounding up of these "forest replacements" I saw an elderly man sitting next to a girl medical orderly under a pine-tree in the company of several other men. He wore no insignia but did not look like a private, and in fact turned out to be an officer. I was incensed by his apparent apathy and indifference and addressed him very sharply. How dared he give up the dignity and honour of an officer for one moment?! My words shook him and he leapt to obey my orders that all stragglers were to be assembled and made into a fighting unit. He carried out the assignment and later fought with distinction.

Wherever the commanders and political workers were up to the mark themselves, the units fought ably in any situation and offered the enemy the stiffest resistance.

But to get back to the events of the day. The Germans continued to bring in new forces against the 9th Mechanised,

and stubborn fighting continued up to June 29. The enemy was unable to straddle the Rovno-Lutsk road in the direction of Klevan, nor in general to penetrate the defences of the 5th Army. After bringing in reinforcements, he succeeded in pushing back the Army's right flank on the Kovel-Lutsk sector and fording the River Styr. However, the 5th Army and attached mechanised corps continued to threaten the flank of the main German group heading for Zhitomir from the north. This was a source of considerable apprehension to the German command, which struck again and again in an effort to eliminate it.

On June 30 serious difficulties developed on the Zhitomir-Kiev direction, which compelled the 5th Army to start pulling back to the line of our old fortified areas. To our dismay, they had not been improved in the least, and the corps retreated from line to line, fighting rearguard "mobile defence" actions.

At Novograd-Volynsky the corps, having repelled enemy attacks, took up defensive positions along the River Sluch, straddling the road to Zhitomir.

By that time the enemy, exploiting his success on the Kiev direction, had reached Zhitomir. He committed large forces to action with the purpose of capturing the Ukrainian capital as quickly as possible, and statements by officers we took prisoner in the fighting at Novograd-Volynsky confirmed this.

The armour of the German panzer and motorised troops advancing on Kiev was by far superior to our outdated T-26 and BT models. Besides, after strenuous marches and ten days of fighting we had few even of these left, and, as far as I knew, the situation in the 19th and 22nd Mechanised Corps was no better. Still, in spite of this and the losses sustained in combat, the corps was still able to fight and gallantly carried out its difficult mission.

In those first engagements the division commanders, Colonel N. V. Kalinin, General N. A. Novikov and Colonel V. M. Chernyaev, proved their worth to the full, performing their duty excellently in the gravest situations. This was due to their thorough knowledge of their profession, their creative initiative, resolve and the ability unhesitatingly to assume responsibility in response to the rapidly changing demands of the situation. Working with such fine officers was easy, though the word can hardly be applied to those days.

Once, when the corps was still fighting in the Klevan area and prevented the Germans from cutting the highway, we were able to get together informally for the first time since the beginning of hostilities. We hugged and thumped backs out of the sheer joy of being alive and fighting. In war comradeship is of tremendous importance in relations between officers.

Colonel Chernyaev fought gallantly at Klevan, but we were soon to lose him. He was wounded in the leg. We evacuated him with all possible precautions, but he died in a Kharkov hospital from gangrene. His comrades from the 9th Mechanised Corps remember him as a hero.

Neither the enemy's tremendous superiority in armour nor his extensive use of aircraft, especially on the main line of attack, which strafed our battle formations unimpeded, could break down the corps' stamina. The nazis were unable to rout us despite all their efforts. All they could achieve was to push back our troops at the cost of great losses.

We sought to inflict heavy losses on the enemy by combining the efforts of infantry, artillery and what armour we had, and succeeded in this in the battles at Lutsk and Novograd-Volynsky. All the corps' division commanders, many of the regimental commanders and political officers were decorated for their distinguished performance in these engagements. Our indefatigable Chief of Staff was awarded an order, and I received my fourth Order of the Red Banner.

At the height of the fighting at Novograd-Volynsky, when the Germans were striving to dislodge the corps to the northeast and ensure their advance to Kiev, an order came from GHQ, placing me in command of an army on the Western Front and instructing me to report to Moscow forthwith.

I handed over the corps command to General A. G. Maslov, and left for Kiev by car on July 14, arriving there that night.

Kreshchatik, the main street, normally bustling with people at this hour, was dark and silent. When I stopped to inquire the road to the Front Headquarters, and lighted a cigarette, voices came shouting from the darkness, "Put out that light!", "Want to be killed?", etc., backed with stronger expressions. This went beyond all the reasonable limits of caution, but I had to submit and hastily extinguished the cigarette.

I located the Front CP at Brovary, on the eastern bank of the Dnieper, and spent the rest of the night there after arranging to fly to Moscow first thing in the morning.

In the morning I reported to the Front Commander, Colonel-General M. P. Kirponos. He was obviously in a state of depression, though he tried to appear at ease. I felt it necessary to inform him of the situation in the 5th Army zone. He listened to me absently, and I had to stop several times while he issued orders to his staff over the telephone. Kirponos spoke in terms of "decisive counterattacks" by a division or two, but I noted that he never asked whether the divisions were capable of counterattacking. I gained the impression that he was simply refusing to face the facts.

And the facts were that the Germans were cracking the Southwestern Front right down the centre and advancing rapidly towards Kiev, threatening to surround the 6th, 26th and 12th Armies.

I left Kiev on July 15, after hearing that the situation on the Western Front was also deteriorating and the Germans were approaching Smolensk.

All the way to Moscow I kept recalling all I had seen, experienced and learned on the eve of the war and in the first weeks of hostilities. I already knew of many examples of unparalleled gallantry displayed by our soldiers. The garrisons of Brest and Libava had performed feats of heroism. Many units, large and small, had fought with boundless courage. Yet it was apparent that we had lost the frontier battle. We could no longer hope to halt the enemy by rushing isolated units and formations to the battered front; it was necessary to build up a powerful force deep inside our territory, a force capable not only of standing up to the enemy's formidable war machine, but of smashing it as well.

The primary task was to halt the enemy. This was a question of life and death for the nation.

It was with satisfaction and hope that I learned that Marshal S. K. Timoshenko was already in command of the Western Front.

The battle of Smolensk was at its height, and I had the honour of taking part in its concluding stage. The circumstances in which I assumed my duties were rather unusual.

ON THE YARTSEVO HEIGHTS

I spent several hours in Moscow at GHQ. I was told there that a "vacuum" had developed in the Smolensk area as a result of a large-scale enemy paratroop landing at Yartsevo. The task was to cover this direction and prevent the Germans from advancing on Vyazma.

I was also told that in view of the importance of the Dnieper line, GHQ and the Western Front Command had organised a strong mobile task force of two or three armoured and one infantry divisions, in the Yartsevo area. Its offensive actions, supported by units of the 16th and 20th Armies, would, it was hoped, improve the general situation and make Smolensk secure. I was being placed in command of this force. I asked what troops would be placed at my disposal. Several divisions and regiments were named, with the added injunction to assume command over any troops I met on the way to Yartsevo.

More specific instructions would be awaiting me at the Front HQ.

The General Staff provided me with two truck-mounted quad machine-guns with crews, a radio station and a small group of officers.

Towards evening of the same day my new-fledged unit arrived at the front. Marshal Timoshenko's CP was located at Kasnya, and I hastened there to report and work out the details of my mission. The Marshal greeted me cordially and introduced me to the Member of the Front Military Council, N. A. Bulganin, and the Chief of the Political Department, D. A. Lestev.

The situation at the front was grave, and this was reflected on the men's faces, but there was no trace of confusion, depression or irresolution.

The Front Command had a clear idea of the general situation: the enemy's central army group was continuing to advance, using large armoured and mechanised units; on

some sectors they had penetrated our positions and were thrusting in depth with the purpose of surrounding and destroying our troops at Smolensk. The nazi command, assuming that the Red Army's strength was sufficiently sapped and it would be incapable of putting up a stiff resistance on the Moscow strategic direction, had decided to overcome the last obstacle here at a single blow. Without awaiting the approach of the 9th and 2nd Field Armies, the 2nd and 3rd Panzer Groups were to split the troops of our Western Front on several sectors, surround and destroy the main forces in the Smolensk area, and open the road to Moscow.

The actions of our undermanned forces were organised accordingly. General P. A. Kurochkin's 20th and General I. S. Konev's 19th Armies were operating in the forward echelons on the Smolensk and Vitebsk sectors. The Front Commander said Kurochkin was hard pressed. His troops were engaged in protracted defensive battles with a greatly superior enemy. From time to time the 20th Army was reinforced by arriving units of the 16th. In particular, I. P. Alekseyenko's 5th Mechanised Corps was committed—also piecemeal—to action.

Konev attempted to regain Vitebsk as his troops detrained, ıt unsuccessfully. The massive strikes of German aircraft gainst the attacking units foiled these attempts and forced hem to retreat.

General Lukin still held Smolensk, and Timoshenko was evidently confident that he would not be dislodged, though by the time he engaged the enemy the Commander of the 16th Army had only two infantry divisions. These, however, were regular outfits from the Transbaikal District, seasoned and with a background of army tradition, the importance of which could not be overestimated. I remembered Timoshenko's words, "Lukin is in a pocket, but he has no intention of retreating." Troops led by such a general would never succumb to the "encirclement complex". The Germans strove to close the pocket in the neighbourhood of the Solovyovo and Ratchinovo crossings on the Dnieper. They were held by a combined unit under Colonel A. I. Lizyukov. In view of the importance of the task, the Front Commander personally assigned Colonel Lizyukov the mission of securing the supply (and if the need arose, retreat) routes of the troops fighting at Smolensk.

"Lizyukov is a reliable commander," Marshal Timoshenko commented. "I recently sent Lev Dovator to investigate the situation there, and he came back with an enthusiastic report. He even suggested that Lizyukov be decorated, and I trust Dovator."

This was the first time I had heard of General Dovator, who was then with the reserve officer group attached to the Front Commander. Soon he was given a cavalry corps and began his gallant road in the Great Patriotic War.

At Front HQ I was brought up to date concerning the situation as of July 17. True, the staff officers were not at all sure that their data corresponded to the real situation, as there was no communication with some armies, notably the 19th and 22nd. Reports came in that unspecified large enemy armoured units had appeared in the Yelnya sector. Unverified reports claimed airborne troops were landing in Yartsevo.

That night I left for Yartsevo. In parting the Front Commander said.

"As soon as regular reinforcements arrive we'll give you two or three divisions. Meanwhile assume command over any units needed to organise resistance on the Yartsevo line."

This I set about doing at once. On the way to Yartsevo I picked up everyone who could be useful in the fighting. Within a short time I got together quite a sizeable force comprising infantry, artillery, signallers, engineers, machine-gunners, mortar crews and medical personnel. We also collected quite a few lorries which came in very handy.

So it was in the actual course of the fighting that the unit later officially known as the "Rokossovsky group" began to take shape.

My HQ was built up literally on the move. It consisted of some fifteen to eighteen officers, ten of them Frunze Academy graduates. They were all keen on their new appointments. A real officer can wish for nothing better than to apply his abilities and knowledge in the most difficult circumstances with the troops in the field. Among these officers was Lieutenant-Colonel Sergei Tarasov, who became the chief of our improvised staff and also headed Operations. Virtually a jack of all (military) trades, he was spare, tough and athletic—qualities which more than once stood him in good stead. He had the knack of always maintaining the cool and logical mind of a staff officer so essential in

the turmoil of battle. After all, a chief of staff requires some degree of quiet, but our headquarters operated under enemy fire, wherever the situation appeared to be most dangerous, in conditions apparently utterly unsuited for staff work.

It was a mobile HQ, mounted on wheels: eight motor cars, a radio station, and the two trucks with the AA machine-gun mounts I had received in Moscow. On arriving at Yartsevo, the staff quickly took its bearings, evaluated the situation, established communications with the units in the area and proceeded to organise the defence. Every once in a while the Chief of Staff blew his top.

"Everything's topsy-turvy, damn it!" he would exclaim in exasperation. "The devil knows what all our training was for! Communications are supposed to be established from higher echelons downwards, but here you have to go begging to the units to lay a line to the commander's CP...."

Shortage of supplies compelled us to lay telephone wires along the very forward line of the battle area. This meant frequent line breakages, and our "officers on wheels" came to the rescue. In fact, messenger communication was decisive, especially in the first ten days.

To the credit of all the officers of the staff, they had a profound realisation of the importance of their task, displaying courage often amounting to self-sacrifice, the ability to take a quick grasp of the most tangled situations, and initiative. Time and again I thought with warm feelings of the Frunze Academy that had fostered these soldiers.

Obviously, the group commander also had to work at the forward area, also on wheels, continuously moving from one sector to another.

The first large unit we encountered east of Yartsevo was the 38th Infantry Division under Colonel M. G. Kirillov, an elderly and seasoned soldier. It belonged to the 19th Army, but in the retreat had lost contact with Army HQ. When the Germans built up pressure at Yartsevo, Kirillov organised the defence as best he could. I had no contact with Konev, and used the 38th Division to hold the enemy at Yartsevo, which was by then already in his hands.

The division commander was relieved to find himself no longer on his own. We replenished his regiments with men collected on the road. As soon as stragglers learned that there were units still resisting the Germans in the Yartsevo area and along the eastern bank of the River Vop they

flocked to us in increasing numbers, sometimes in units or groups headed by officers.

As a witness of and participant in the events, I think it important to record this fact. Many units had gone through harrowing experiences; they had been scattered by enemy tanks and aircraft, yet they continued to seek leadership. They wanted to fight. It was thanks to this deeply rooted feeling that we succeeded in our organisational efforts.

Soon we acquired another large unit in the shape of Colonel G. M. Mikhailov's 101st Tank Division. To be sure, it was undermanned and had only about eighty old tanks with weak armour and seven new heavy tanks, but in any case it reinforced us substantially. The commander was a stalwart officer who had earned the title of Hero of the Soviet Union at Khalkhin-Gol. His trouble was that he was accustomed to operate with small units and now this method resulted in setbacks and unnecessary losses. This irritated him, and irritation is a poor adviser to a commander of whatever rank.

On the 18th or 19th of July, Tarasov and I went to Kirillov's OP. There was a lull in the fighting. Several officers drove up in a car, and among them I suddenly saw a familiar face.

"Kamera!" I exclaimed. "Is it you?"

Sure enough, it was him, my old comrade from the time of the conflict on the Chinese Eastern Railway, where I had led the 5th Separate Kuban Cavalry Brigade in which he had commanded the artillery battalion. A fine officer, a staunch Bolshevik (he had been a commissar in the Civil War), and a wonderful comrade.

The meeting proved to be a timely one. When Kamera told me that he was the 19th Army's Chief of Artillery and had lost contact with the Army, I suggested he should head the artillery of our group and help us beat back the attacking enemy. Ivan Kamera readily agreed. I sighed with relief, for at Yartsevo, just as in the fighting of the 9th Corps, with tanks before us, artillery was our main hope.

The situation in the sector proved more serious than the Front staff officers had realised. In the very first engagement we discovered that the Germans had much more substantial forces at Yartsevo than the troops that had been dropped from the air: the 7th Panzer Division had executed a turning movement north of Smolensk and broken through to Yartsevo. Reconnaissance and POW statements indicated

the arrival of motorised units of the enemy panzer group in the Smolensk area.

Yartsevo, as I have said, was in enemy hands; he had forced the River Vop, established a bridgehead on the eastern bank and was attempting—as yet cautiously—to advance along the highway in the direction of Vyazma. We also recorded enemy activity on the southern flank, in the direction of the river crossings in the rear echelons of the 16th and 20th Armies.

After ascertaining the situation I formed a general idea of the enemy's intentions, namely, to close the ring around our troops fighting in the Smolensk area—he evidently planned to achieve this on the line of the River Vop and, southwards, along the Dnieper—securing favourable conditions for a breakthrough to the approaches of Moscow along the main highway. Our two divisions were faced with the difficult task of foiling these intentions.

Our defences had no second echelon. All I had for reserves was two regiments of the 101st Tank Division, deployed slightly to the rear of the left flank. The division's motorised infantry regiment defended Dubrovo on the right and Gorodok and Lagi on the left; an antitank artillery regiment was deployed in its sector. The 240th Howitzer Regiment was deployed on the right flank southwest of Zamoshye. Thus the highway and railway had reliable antitank protection, and, in the circumstances, this was something. The 38th Infantry Division held the defence east of Yartsevo along the bank of the River Vop. The armoured regiments of the 101st Tank Division held favourable positions for counterattacking in the event of a German breakthrough along the highway.

I reported the situation to the Front Commander, adding that the divisions arriving at the Yartsevo sector on orders from the Front represented little more than the numbers by which they were designated: one had 260 effectives, the other even less.

By dint of strenuous efforts on the part of all command officers of our group, with fighting going on all the time, we succeeded within a very short period in organising resistance to the enemy and checking his advance eastward, and then in dealing the Germans blows now on one sector, now on another, frequently scoring appreciable tactical successes which helped strengthen discipline among the troops, giving confidence to the officers and men, who saw that

they could actually beat the enemy. In the circumstances this was of tremendous importance which could not be overestimated.

Our activity evidently puzzled the enemy command, who encountered resistance where it was not expected; they saw that our troops not only fought back but too attacked (even if not always successfully). This tended to create an exaggerated idea of our forces in the sector, and the enemy failed to take advantage of his great superiority. The nazi command "recognised" our existence, as it were. It fed more and more troops into the Yartsevo area, delivered massive air strikes against our crossings and battle formations, and intensified its artillery and mortar fire. We found shelter in the woods and by digging into the ground.

The heavy, continuous fighting at Yartsevo kept the German troops from fanning out to the south. This was our contribution to the Western Front's general effort, the aim of which was to check the enemy, inflict the greatest possible losses and at the same time prevent him from surrounding the armies fighting at Smolensk.

The force defending the Dnieper crossings in the rear of the 16th and 20th Armies, which had at first operated independently, was by the logic of events eventually subordinated to our group.

Colonel Alexander Lizyukov proved in fact to be a remarkable officer who was in his element among the dangerous surprises challenging him continuously on his sector. He was a man of impeccable personal bravery and displayed a remarkable ability to manoeuvre with small forces. At one point the Germans actually closed the trap for several hours, but Lizyukov repelled them, his units wiping out the whole enemy force.

Lizyukov was a tankman himself (he had been deputy commander of the 37th Tank Division before the war) and his force consisted of the tankmen who had survived from the armoured and motorised infantry regiments of the 5th Mechanised Corps. They had only fifteen tanks, but the men, up to and including the regimental commanders Sakhno and Shepelyuk, were well seasoned in battle.

Colonel Lizyukov singled out Major Mikhail Sakhno for special praise. "Major Sakhno," he declared, "is the true hero of the defence of the Solovyovo crossing." (Incidentally, if you want to form an opinion of an officer listen to what he says about his subordinates. It is part of the charac-

ter of a good commander to be able to define his comrades' contribution to the common cause in the difficult struggle with the enemy.)

The fighting on the Yartsevo sector continued day and night. Our troops suffered considerable losses, justified, however, by the importance of their task. We encountered numerous difficulties in replenishing the divisions and activating new elements and units. It was a motley crowd that collected at the assembly point, stragglers who had come out of encirclement singly and in small groups. All these personnel we were sending to the units had to be welded into a cohesive, ordered combat group. This is no simple or quick task in the best of conditions, and we were short of time. Men got to know each other's worth in battle. We were not always able to set up Communist Party organisations in the newly formed units, so the burden of responsibility was particularly great on all officers, from platoon to division commander. Much depended on the way an officer behaved. He had to overcome the fear of death and force himself to be wherever his presence was necessary for the success of his mission and to bolster his troops' morale, even though normally his rank and position would not have required him to be there.

At Yartsevo we had really good officers. The men had confidence in them, and they roused a spirit that led to the fulfilment of the most difficult assignments, to feats of valour. Under their leadership the elements and units grew stronger literally by the hour, fighting the enemy purposefully and with determination, whether in the attack, in the defence, or in rearguard actions.

I am no advocate of bravado or senseless bravery. They serve no purpose and fall short of the code of behaviour of any self-respecting commander. But there are times when one must rise above what any code expects.

In the first days of the fighting east of Yartsevo, our OP was situated on the edge of a wood. An infantry regiment was holding the defence about a kilometre away. Enemy artillery was letting off a few rounds occasionally. General Kamera and I decided to see how the infantry had dug in, and we made our way to the trenches. At that very moment things began to happen.

Line upon line of German soldiers began pouring over the heights about two kilometres away, followed by nearly a dozen tanks. Our troops showed signs of disquiet but did not

waver and kept up steady machine-gun fire; then the howitzers went into action, and Kamera promised that a 76-mm battery would deploy soon on the edge of the wood for direct fire.

This was not bad for a beginning.

The German infantry hit the ground, and even the tanks stopped for some reason. Our men seemed to be quite steady now.

But then the enemy aircraft appeared.

Our trenches were bombed and strafed. Enemy gun and mortar fire increased. The German submachine-gunners advanced, followed by the tanks. Planes circled overhead, peeling off to bomb and machine-gun our positions. Our men wavered, then began to run for the wood, first singly, then in groups.

Anyone who has seen troops fleeing in disorder knows what a grim sight it is.

But then loud cries came from the running crowd:

"Wait! Where're you running? Back!"

"Look at the generals! They're still there! Back!"

Ivan Kamera and I were indeed standing full height in the trenches, realising that this was perhaps the only way the situation could be saved. The men's own voices and our self-control had a magic effect. The fleeing men returned to their positions, opened fire and again forced the enemy infantry to the ground. The 76-mm battery had by then deployed, opened direct fire and hit several tanks. The rest turned back. The attack was repelled.

I don't remember who told the story, most likely one of the men during a chat over a smoke after the fight. It had been one of the running men, an elderly moustached World War I veteran, who had stopped the rot.

"Orders now!... Who'll give orders?... We need orders—," he kept crying out, then formed a decision in his own mind and shouted, "Halt! Take cover and return fire!"

Another example, also from Yartsevo, which I witnessed myself. It was a pitched battle, the enemy was advancing and our troops were repelling his attacks with difficulty. They were supported by artillery. Then the German aircraft struck at a howitzer battery. It went on firing. Every order was executed properly. The battery commander kept a sharp look-out on the sky. When he saw bombs falling in the direction of the battery positions he would shout, "Take

cover!" And almost before the smoke from the explosions had cleared he would shout again, "Man the guns!"

The battery continued its fire.

This was an example of the courage men can show under good leadership. Unfortunately, I do not remember the battery commander's name: time effaces many memories.

The battery suffered some losses and one gun was damaged, but the gunners carried out their task with distinction.

I could cite many such examples of courage and heroism displayed by whole units and regiments. Famous among the troops of our group was the motorised infantry regiment under Lieutenant-Colonel Vorobyov. It was defending the main Moscow-Minsk road, and we had the greatest confidence in its commander.

The combat area was expanding with every day that passed. The enemy continued to throw in new forces, and we too received replenishments. Troop control was getting more and more difficult. Our mobile CP hugged the forward line: it was the only way to ensure adequate control with our thinning staff, for within ten days more than half of the staff officers had been either killed or severely wounded. Once I almost lost my Chief of Staff. He had to go to the Front CP urgently and I thoughtlessly suggested that he take the more imposing ZIS-101 sedan instead of the "jeep", although nazi airmen hunted command cars, without regard for time, bullets or bombs. Lt.-Colonel Tarasov became the quarry of such a "hunt" himself. He dived into a shack on the roadside. The Germans machine-gunned the roof and dropped a packet of incendiary bombs for good measure. The shack went up in a cloud of smoke and flames. But for his athletic prowess the Chief of Staff would not have escaped from the inferno of burning straw and firewood. Somewhat scorched and very annoyed, he returned and took up his duties as though nothing had happened (subsequently this excellent soldier commanded a division and was promoted to the rank of major-general).

One day at dawn—it was the end of July—I was awakened and informed that a general had arrived and was requesting permission to report. I went out to meet him. It was General V. I. Vinogradov, Commander of the 7th Mechanised Corps, attached to my units together with his staff, a fully manned, excellently equipped headquarters. It had a radio station, staff cars and all other essentials for controlling a large unit. The Chief of Staff was Colonel M. S. Malinin.

After the preliminaries, I instructed Malinin to select a location for a new command post, and went about my own affairs.

The new Chief of Staff turned to Tarasov:

"When do we get on with handing things over?"

"What things?" Tarasov said with amazement. He pulled a writing pad out of his map case—his entire paperwork.

Things were changing, and I felt it the very next morning when a girl in uniform rode up on a motorcycle.

"What's this?" I inquired.

"Breakfast for the Commanding General."

"Where from?"

"Headquarters."

Till then the commander had slept like the rest under a pine-tree or at best in a car and had his meals out of a soldier's mess-tin. The fork and fresh napkin seemed like things from another world.

At first I was rather displeased by the fact that Malinin had, in my view, placed the CP too far from the forward lines (eight or ten kilometres). As I myself had instructed him to choose the place, however, there was nothing more I could do. Still I could not help remarking.

"Haven't we got too far away from the front? We'll soon be forgetting there's a war on. . . ."

The Colonel looked at me with surprise, but maintained a disciplined silence.

The coolness of our first encounter quickly wore off, however. I soon found that the CP was situated correctly, as the fighting tended to drag on. In general, from the outset Colonel Malinin showed himself to be a highly intelligent person and an experienced organiser. We got on well, and later a firm, army friendship developed between us.

Now we had a proper CP, with observation posts in the forward area and wire communication with the troops. An experienced eye could tell at once that Colonel Malinin presided over a close-knit, competent, efficient staff that reacted swiftly to every change in the situation. Occasionally the Chief of Staff's domineering personality tended to override the initiative of his subordinates, but with time this passed.

General Ivan Kamera, who had contributed so much to the fighting on the Yartsevo sector, was recalled to Moscow, where he was appointed Chief of Artillery of the Western Front. I was glad to hear that he had received the kind of job he deserved. His place was taken by Major-General

Vasily Kazakov, Chief of Artillery of the 7th Mechanised Corps, who impressed me favourably when he began with making a round of the firing positions to take stock of our ordnance and our men.

My deputy, General Vinogradov, was also shortly recalled.

By the end of July our group's position was decidedly stronger. I felt greatly relieved with a full-blooded staff at my disposal. The Front Command reinforced us with several tank battalions and the Moscow Party Organisation sent a Communist Volunteer Battalion. I was able to welcome the unit in person, but the German airmen seemed to have sensed the occasion and "saluted" them from the air. Bombs started falling and the men had to disperse into the woods. When it was over I promised the men that they would soon have the opportunity to repay the enemy "greeting" in kind.

We got together everything we could on the Yartsevo sector and struck, taking the enemy completely by surprise: he had himself attacked on the previous day, been repulsed, and never suspected that after such a difficult defensive battle we should be capable of striking back. It was the surprise element that we exploited. We struck with the main forces of the 38th Infantry and the 101st Tank Divisions with attached artillery and armour, including ten heavy KV tanks. As a result, our troops took Yartsevo, crossed the Vop and captured advantageous positions on the western bank, where they entrenched and repulsed all counterattacks.

Once again Vorobyov's motorised infantry regiment distinguished itself, displaying fine co-ordination with the armour. The Moscow Communist Battalion received its baptism of fire. The Communists spoke proudly of having opened their "battle account", but were frankly worried by enemy air supremacy. Yartsevo "old-timers" had got used to it, but it was definitely hard on unseasoned troops. In the fighting for Yartsevo we suffered most from air strikes. Nevertheless, we achieved success thanks to the courage and heroism of troops, which only recently had practically lost all proper organisation.

This was the first time I had seen our 37-mm anti-aircraft batteries bring down three dive-bombers, and it forced other enemy aircraft to climb higher. Up till then they had been brazen indeed, attacking even lone cars. German fliers often dropped empty petrol drums with holes drilled in them that screeched as they fell. This struck us as sheer hooliganism.

Active as we were on the Yartsevo sector, we kept a close

watch on the situation to the south, at the river crossings. On orders from Western Front, dated July 27, our group was set the task of holding Yartsevo and preventing the enemy from breaking through towards Vyazma. I sighed with relief when I was able to reinforce Colonel Lizyukov with the antitank battalion of the 108th Infantry Division and a machine-gun company. Soon we moved other units there, subordinating the whole sector to the Commander of the 44th Infantry Corps, V. A. Yushkevich (who still held the old rank designation of division commander). Now we could regard this direction as secure.

The situation in the Smolensk area was getting more and more difficult, and not only for us but for the enemy as well. It was becoming apparent that the Germans had got bogged down in the battle for the city. Viewed in development, the enemy's *blitzkrieg* plan had gone wrong, and gone wrong at the very beginning of the war.

At the end of July the German Command once again attempted to surround our armies. From reconnaissance data and statements by prisoners captured in the fighting for Yartsevo it became clear that a new attack was being prepared with the object of severing the possible retreat routes of the 16th and 20th Armies. This was to be achieved by throwing the 7th and 20th Panzer Divisions against our defences at Yartsevo.

This information enabled us to take the necessary countermeasures in due time. The enemy suffered great losses in armour and manpower, and only at some sectors did he succeed in slightly pushing back our troops; by the end of July the offensive petered out. A decisive part in this was played by artillery, ably organised in this battle by General V. I. Kazakov.

The KV tanks literally stunned the enemy. They stood up to the fire of all the guns with which the German Panzers were armed at the time. But they were a fine sight when they came out of battle. Their armour was pock-marked all over and their gun barrels were often holed in several places. The BT-7 tanks also made a good showing. They were fast and manoeuvrable, and scattered enemy infantry; but we lost many of these machines: when hit they blazed like torches.

In this engagement it was not only we who displayed a new weapon in the shape of our KV tanks. The Germans countered with new types of antitank rifles that riddled the armour of our old tanks. A test with a captured rifle revealed

that its special bullets could even pierce the side armour of a T-34 tank. We rushed the rifle to Moscow.

Early in the fighting I was worried by the fact that in defence our infantry hardly delivered small-arms fire against an attacking enemy. As a rule he was repulsed by well-organised artillery fire. But what about the infantry? The question was raised by a number of officers, and I instructed several of them to study the situation and at the same time decided to check personally the forward defensive systems at one of the most active sections.

Our prewar manuals and regulations provided for defences to be organised according to the "foxhole" system. In foxholes, it was claimed, infantry would suffer less losses from enemy fire. Theoretically this may have been so, and the defence lines looked very pretty, but alas, in practice the notion proved to be misconceived.

I crawled out to one of the foxholes and took over from the man there. When I was left alone, I still retained the knowledge that others were similarly dug in to the right and left of me. But I could neither see them nor feel their presence. And the section commander could not see me or, in fact, any of his men. But the battle went on, gun and mortar shells burst, bullets and fragments whined overhead, once in a while bombs exploded.

I was an old soldier and had taken part in many battles but, to be quite frank, I was not at all comfortable or at ease in that hole. I kept wanting to climb out and see if my comrades were still in their own foxholes; or perhaps they had abandoned them and I was alone in the field? I could easily imagine the constant feeling of alarm and apprehension that must beset the raw recruit for the first time on the battlefield.

Soldiers are only human and it is quite natural that, especially in times of danger, they want to feel a comrade's support and see their commander. Furthermore, it is essential for the section commander to see his men, to be able to encourage one or praise the other, to influence them and keep them in hand.

The foxhole system of defence proved ill-adapted for the kind of warfare we were engaged in. We discussed my own observations as well as those of the other officers who had been studying the infantry in the forward area and came to the unanimous conclusion that the foxhole system should be abandoned forthwith and replaced by a system of trenches.

That very day relevant instructions were issued to all units and a report was dispatched to the Western Front Commander. With characteristic resolution, Marshal Timoshenko gave his consent. After that our defences became stronger. We had several World War I veterans, privates, NCOs and officers who had had a taste of trench warfare, and with their help we rapidly mastered the fairly simple system.

In the beginning of August the enemy took Smolensk and any attempts to throw him back would be futile. Marshal Timoshenko ordered a retreat. The 16th and 20th Armies withdrew safely to the eastern bank of the Dnieper at the Solovyovo and Ratchinovo crossings and were used to strengthen the defences on the Kholm-Zhirkovsky, Yartsevo, Yelnya line. Our group assisted the troops of Generals Lukin and Kurochkin by launching an attack at Yartsevo and further south.

With the German Army Group Centre, comprising the 2nd and 9th Armies and two Panzer groups, striking forward, the nazi command was confident that the operation would end in the encirclement and annihilation of the Western Front's main forces in the Smolensk area. This plan failed, and instead of the vacuum he had hoped for the enemy encountered new strong defences in the Moscow strategic sector. To overcome them the Germans required additional troops and time.

The Front Commander summoned me. "We're going to visit the heroes of Smolensk," he said, "... and you'll take over the Sixteenth Army."

We first drove to General Kurochkin, the Commander of the 20th Army. It transpired that he was being recalled to Moscow and Lukin had been appointed to take over the 20th Army.

The Army Commander's tent was pitched in a birch grove near the village of Vasilki. A crude wooden table before the entrance. A still, blue sky overhead. It was very quiet and peaceful. A car drove up and Lukin was practically carried out of it. An air strike at one of the crossings had caused a terrific jam. The general himself had rushed in to restore order and had been wounded by an explosion.

We had known each other since the thirties, when Lukin had been chief of the command section of the Red Army's Personnel Department. He was a veteran soldier, an expe-

rienced and educated commander and a man of great integrity. When we met now, for the first time since the beginning of the war, he said as though summing up all he had been able and unable to accomplish.

"The Sixteenth Army wasn't defeated—it was frittered away."

A short, stocky divisional commissar with the round, tranquil face of a peasant hovered unobtrusively over the wounded man, helping him to make himself comfortable on a chair.

"Lobachov, Member of the Military Council," Lukin introduced him.

The Front Commander congratulated comrades Lukin, Kurochkin and Lobachov on being decorated with the Order of the Red Banner. He expressed the view that in the course of the heavy fighting the troops of the Western Front had completely thwarted the enemy's offensive. His units had suffered substantial losses and would be incapable of offensive operations for at least ten days. He then officially informed us of the changes in leadership and inquired if we had any requests. I asked for Colonel Malinin to be appointed my Chief of Staff, and Kazakov, Chief of Artillery, especially as for all practical purposes our group had now merged with the 16th Army.

The 16th Army now represented a substantial force: six divisions—Colonel Mikhailov's 101st Tank, newly appointed Colonel Lizyukov's 1st Moscow Motorised Infantry, Colonel Kirillov's 38th, Colonel Chernyshov's 152nd, Colonel Gryaznov's 64th and Colonel Orlov's 108th—F. T. Remizov's 27th Tank Brigade, a heavy artillery battalion and other units. The Army was holding the defence along a 50-kilometre frontage straddling the Smolensk-Vyazma road.

The enemy soon made an attempt to penetrate our defences in the Yartsevo sector, evidently deciding to test their strength. All he achieved, however, was severe casualties. The fighting was heavy for two days, then the attacks petered out.

For the first time we saw a battery of rocket artillery, the famous *katyushas*, in action. They scored a direct hit on the advancing German infantry and tanks. We climbed out of the trenches and, standing full height, watched the spectacular display. The men spilled out of the trenches, enthusiastically cheering each salvo and jubilantly watching the enemy's hasty retreat.

The effect of *katyusha* fire on an attacking enemy was devastating. It was not so good against dug-in infantry, because only a direct hit on a trench was effective. *Katyushas* scattered their projectiles over a wide area. Subsequently we took this into account. Another aspect we had to reckon with at first was the extreme secrecy involved in bringing the rocket launchers into action. The instructions were so involved on this score that they all but discouraged the use of *katyushas*. As many artillery commanders remarked, fussing with them was more like attempting to satisfy the whims of a capricious woman. I decided to take it upon myself to simplify the instructions somewhat. When used skilfully, these rocket weapons yielded good results.

The army was gradually building up its ordnance, and this enabled us to counter enemy superiority in armour with the strength of our artillery. It was a great help to the troops in combat, and the infantry had a great respect for the gunners. Furthermore, we had learned the enemy tactics in using armour.

There was nothing we could think of to offset the German aircraft. We had to fall back again on artillery—37-mm guns—but they had a low altitude range, and in any case we had very few.

Our units obtained replenishments from troops coming out of encirclement. Some had trekked all the way from the frontier, others from Minsk, etc., etc. There were bright and dark sides to this great flux. Many officers led groups of men out with arms in hand, fighting their way through, and for these I had nothing but the greatest esteem. But how many there were, officers and men, who came out unarmed! The picture one could draw from their accounts was as follows. First, after shaking off the enemy, they moved in organised groups; then when they encountered the Germans again, their officers ordered them to split up into smaller groups which made their way as best they could.

They all had to be armed. But what with? Supplies from the rear were no more than a trickle. Someone—I think it was Alexei Lobachov—suggested that if the men from encirclement could pass through enemy-occupied territory and cross the front in whole groups, why couldn't we send scouts behind enemy positions to scour the abandoned battlefields for weapons? We tried this, with signal success, and for some time we got much of what we needed literally from under the Germans' noses. Groups of fearless men, including many who

had come out of encirclement and knew the best paths—brought in rifles, submachine-guns, machine-guns, mortars and even an occasional 45-mm gun, to say nothing of ammunition, of which we were also in dire need.

So life went on. In spite of all its setbacks, the 16th Army now represented a formidable force, and its fighting spirit steadily improved.

Having suffered considerable losses in the course of his latest offensive, the enemy went over to the defence. By mid-August our reconnaissance established that the Germans were busily fortifying the line along the western bank of the River Vop. From captured orders and other documents of the German 9th Army we learned that intensive work was going on along the entire line of defence.

Soon we were the talk of Moscow. Soviet Information Bureau communiqués frequently mentioned the Yartsevo Group and later the 16th Army. Delegations from Moscow factories, Party and Komsomol organisations visited us, as well as Party workers, government officials, writers and press correspondents; actors often performed for the troops. All this contributed to the establishment of firm and beneficial contacts between front and rear.

Once we got a telephone call from the General Staff to meet a British military delegation headed by a general representing the British Armed Forces on the Soviet General Staff. I was on the left flank, in the neighbourhood of the Solovyovo crossing, and frankly had no time for visitors. I ordered Malinin to play host to the guests, and he took them to Colonel Kirillov's 38th Division CP. The meeting went off in a polite, diplomatic atmosphere and was, as Malinin and Lobachov later told me, rather cordial. The British officers managed to put away several of our frontline rations of "good Russian vodka" and were unstinting with their praise and toasts to the Red Army.

In the second half of August our neighbour on the right, General I. S. Konev's 19th Army, launched an offensive. It took the enemy by surprise and gained some local success. However, the Germans were well entrenched and their defences were not penetrated. After that our Western Front troops continued offensive operations only in the Yelnya area, infiltrated in part by enemy forces during their July offensive.

The 16th Army held its positions, engaging in reconnaissance in force and occasionally launching attacks on some

sectors. The enemy facing us engaged in similar activities. We established that the armoured and motorised divisions that had been fighting opposite us had been replaced by infantry.

Thanks to Malinin's efforts, the Army CP was placed on a solid footing. We moved from tents to dugouts and were well camouflaged in a dense forest. True, the dugouts seemed dank and cooped-up after the light and airy tents, but they had an air of permanence and solidity about them. The staff officers worked well together, and I was pleased to see that an interesting and extremely efficient team of leaders was gradually shaping up. This was extremely important. When a military leader prepares his troops in time of peace he has the time and opportunity to select and sift his personnel, there is plenty of time for training and instruction, time for different temperaments and characters to get adjusted to each other. Here the adjustment was done by the war. The Military Council Member, A. A. Lobachov, remarked on several occasions that we had managed to team up so quickly because each of us had "been through it" and knew what it was like. The staff officers of the 16th Army showed their worth in the complex and dynamic circumstances of late July and early August, especially the Chief of Staff, M S. Malinin, Chief of Artillery, V. I. Kazakov, our Chief of Communications, P. Y. Maksimenko (an elderly colonel and past-master of his job), and Chief of Armoured and Mechanised Troops, G. N. Oryol.

Each leader had his own style of work and approach to his subordinates. There is no fixed standards for judging such a delicate task. We did our best to create a favourable working atmosphere in which there would be no place for relations based on an "as you say, sir" footing, no place for a feeling of restraint in which people hesitate to express views differing from those of a senior officer. It was in this spirit that my generation of Red Army officers had been brought up by the Party.

At Headquarters the Chief of Staff, M. S. Malinin, Member of the Military Council, A. A. Lobachov and I shared one room—the staff room, as we called it. I could thus be present at reports to the Chief of Staff by the Chiefs of Intelligence, Operations, or Communications; Malinin attended when the arm commanders reported to me, and the talks which the Military Council Member held with new arrivals and unit commanders usually took place in my presence. This arrange-

ment enabled me to keep my finger on the pulse of the situation. In the staff room we discussed decisions to be taken and the contents and wording of orders and instructions. The total effect was to help us all in our work and foster useful initiative. There was more imaginative thinking and flashes of inspiration.

The Chief of Staff was a calm, pedantic man with full confidence in himself and his subordinates. One never doubted his ability to see that an order was carried out. One trait of Malinin's was perhaps rather unusual for the chief of a large headquarters. He always insisted on inspecting a future field of battle with his own eyes. It must have been his way of checking up on his own work. He frequently visited the frontlines and was known among the troops, which also served to enhance the prestige of our headquarters.

I was glad that my assistants were educated men in love with their work, but what I liked most in them was their ability to uphold their views. This made me think twice over a suggestion, and as often as not I would end up by saying, "You're right there, I overlooked that point."

An invaluable person in our headquarters was General Vasily Kazakov. As I said before, at the time artillery was our main hope. General Kazakov had deep knowledge, intuition and the ability to work with people all the way down to battery level. The troops were very fond of him.

We generally used observation posts located in the infantry division areas, but our favourite one was the observation post set up by the artillerymen on the top floor and chimney stack of the Yartsevo mill, which offered an excellent view of the terrain. The enemy positions could be seen in considerable depth and all troop movements could be spotted. The only inconvenience was that to reach it we had to dash across a shallow valley about a kilometre wide which the enemy had well targeted. Whenever a target worthy of attention appeared in sight the Germans opened fire, and what fire! A lone car charging across the valley was just such a target. The valley was in full sight of the entrenched troops on both sides of the front, and this fact roused in us a kind of gambling spirit that was hardly in keeping with the position of an army commander and chief of artillery. All the same we took a delight in dodging across that stretch of no man's land under fire and got through every time.

The town suburbs began immediately beyond the valley. Here, however, we had to be very careful, crawling at times

so as not to give away our gunners' OP. There was not a living soul in the town and a dead silence reigned there, broken only by gun and mortar shell blasts. The famous Yartsevo Textile Mills had been reduced to rubble by German air raids.

We usually returned to the CP under cover of darkness.

All night and almost till dawn German bombers droned overhead making for Moscow. The persistent wicked droning grated on the nerves, arousing anger and frustration, because there was nothing we could do to prevent the nightly raids on the capital. But how glad we were in the mornings when we heard that the heroes of Moscow's anti-aircraft defences had scattered the enemy bombers and prevented them from getting through.

We were not being harassed by the nazi aircraft at the time, with one exception that at first alarmed us greatly. Now here, now there enemy aircraft would drop paper bags containing tiny insects over our positions. Orders were given to keep careful watch over enemy flights and to collect and burn at once any suspicious looking packages. Several bags we sent, with due precautions, to Moscow for a check-up. The people in Moscow were also alarmed and hastened to carry out tests. Meanwhile the bags continued to drop from the sky. Many of them broke open on impact and their contents crawled away, defying our efforts at disinfection. But then the test results came from Moscow. Nothing to worry about. The nazis simply wanted to play on our nerves.

We carried on local fighting, improved our defences and instructed the men in the skills they would require tomorrow in combat. We introduced a system of monthly junior officers courses for privates with secondary or higher education who had distinguished themselves in combat. Marshal Timoshenko warmly supported this idea. The Party and Komsomol cells launched a movement for spreading the know-how of men who had destroyed tanks with incendiary bottles. The shock of the initial stages of the war was wearing off. Once, entering our dugout, I overheard Lobachov putting the head of the political department of one of our divisions into the right mood:

"War and all its hardships are a soldier's natural state, and you speak of nerves. It's time you put a stop to it!"

I regard it as my duty as a comrade to pay homage to the memory of General Alexei Lobachov, Member of the Army Military Council. We worked together in

complete concord. Lobachov loved the army, knew the men, and I always received the greatest help from him. He was the type of man with whom one seeks to communicate. We lived in the same dugout together, and later we usually chose quarters we could share. When, among other war correspondents, Vladimir Stavsky (also a stalwart Bolshevik, and an interesting writer with more than a smattering knowledge of military affairs), began his visits, the three of us would share quarters. There were times when we felt very close to one another.

By the time we started serving together, General Lobachov was a seasoned high-level political officer. His life, however, had not been an easy one, and it reflected all the main aspects of the time in which he lived.

War has always been, and will always remain, a grim test for any man. In our case this natural process was made much more complicated. Shortly before the war a great number of commanders and political workers had been moved up from the lower echelons to high army positions. They lacked experience, knowledge, the ability to take their bearings on a scale they had never dreamed of before. All this had to be acquired in battle. Lobachov told me how he, a senior political instructor[1], was promoted to the rank of Divisional Commissar in no more than one month, and in 1939 was placed at the head of the Political Department of the Moscow Military District. He considered himself fortunate to have served throughout 1940 as Member of the Military Council of the 16th Army, which had been formed in the Transbaikal area, and spoke with warm gratitude of its commander. Nevertheless, it had been hard going. Only a keen mind, organisational flair and a Bolshevik ability to learn from life had pulled him through.

In September, General Ivan Konev was appointed Commander of the Western Front. General M. F. Lukin took over the 19th Army from him, and General F. A. Yershakov assumed command of the 20th.

By then the Yelnya operation had been successfully concluded and the enemy was thrown back. On our sector, as well as our neighbours', there were no changes. The three army headquarters maintained close contact and developed good co-ordination along their boundaries.

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[1] A company political officer of rank equivalent to Senior Lieutenant.—*Tr.*

It was then that my friendship with Lukin developed. He still had difficulty in getting about, and Lobachov and I frequently visited him at the 19th Army CP. We discussed questions pertaining to our troops, feeling confident that the enemy would be unable to penetrate our lines. The boundaries were reliably secured and we had considered and worked out mutual aid measures to flock enemy penetrations at any sector.

In the second half of September, the 16th Army HQ drew up a detailed defence plan. It envisaged stubborn resistance to the enemy, but it also contained a variant providing for the contingency of the enemy penetrating our defences. It defined the order in which our troops should retreat, fighting delaying actions and inflicting maximum casualties on the enemy. Our guiding considerations were that the enemy still enjoyed great superiority, had greater power of manoeuvre, and still held the initiative: so we had to be prepared for every contingency.

The plan was submitted to General Konev, who endorsed the first part, dealing with the defence, and rejected the second, detailing the procedure for a forced retreat.

The lull on our sector of the front was beginning to rouse our suspicions. The Germans were evidently preparing for something. We had no way of guessing their intentions and the reconnaissance we conducted with our own forces confirmed that we had only infantry opposite us. No information of any importance reached us from Front HQ.

In general, the army commanders were poorly informed: we had but a vague idea of goings-on within the Front's sector, and none at all beyond it. This was a major drawback.

Mikhail Lukin called on us with a group of officers just as a Moscow variety company was giving a performance in a clearing near the Army HQ, with the yellowing forest as a backdrop. It was a good show enthusiastically hailed by the audience, but Lukin and I went aside to discuss the enemy's strange behaviour.

We decided to carry out a reconnaissance in force on the following day. This we did, and the prisoners we took stated that armoured and mechanised units had appeared in their rear echelons in the Yartsevo sector.

We took reinforcement measures, especially in the divisions straddling the main Vyazma-Smolensk road. General Kazakov organised counterfire, in which a *katyusha* battalion was to take part.

On the night of October 2 observers at the frontline and reconnaissance groups reported hearing the rumble of tank engines on the enemy side.

At dawn the Germans launched an attack on our central sector, just where we had expected it. For the first time enemy aircraft bombed our CP, though without inflicting much damage.

From the Observation Post we saw German tanks start up almost simultaneously with the opening of artillery and mortar fire, followed by infantry. We responded at once with all our artillery. The antitank batteries opened up direct fire, and *katyushas*—now whole regiment—launched salvo after salvo against the enemy soldiers going over the top.

Our infantry did not falter and met the dense attacking lines with a hail of small-arms fire. On some sectors there was hand-to-hand fighting.

The struggle lasted till noon. The enemy suffered great losses without achieving success. The 16th Army held its positions.

In the afternoon fierce fighting broke out on Lukin's sector. The enemy succeeded in pushing back some units on his right flank, but Lukin said he hoped to restore the situation with his own forces.

All the following day the enemy kept our detences under heavy fire without attempting an offensive. Groups of aircraft bombed battery positions and made extensive reconnaissance of roads in the direction of Vyazma.

Towards evening of October 3, reports from the 19th Army sounded a note of alarm.

"I'll have to pull back my right flank and turn it north," Lukin told me over the telephone. "And I've no communication with the neighbouring 30th Army."

Lukin requested help, and we dispatched two infantry divisions, an armour brigade and artillery regiment.

Our neighbour on the left, General Yershakov, reported that all was quiet. Nor were there any alerts from Front HQ.

Yet the storm was brewing. We were soon to witness it ourselves, and in completely unforeseen circumstances.

SURPRISE ORDER

In the evening of October 5, I received a telegram from Western Front HQ instructing me forthwith to hand over my sector with troops to General Yershakov, report at Vyazma on October 6 with the whole of the 16th Army HQ, and organise a counterattack in the direction of Yukhnov. The orders stated I would receive five infantry divisions with reinforcing means.

All seemed very strange. To the north, a serious situation was developing, especially in General Lukin's sector, and there was no information about how events were developing on the Front's left flank and southwards. . . .

Lobachov, Kazakov, Malinin and Oryol were all present when the telegram arrived, and it aroused their suspicions just as it did mine.

"Leave the troops at such a time?" the Chief of Staff exclaimed. "This is incredible!"

I requested that the order be repeated in writing and undersigned by the Front Commander in person. That night an airman delivered the order duly signed by General Konev and the Military Council Member N. A. Bulganin.

The suspicions were dispelled, but not the doubts.

Meanwhile representatives of the 20th Army arrived to take over. Our headquarters packed up and headed for its new destination. We all had a foreboding, amplified by the fact that we had neither troops nor the assurance that we would find any at wherever we were being sent to. We were unable to contact Front HQ by radio and felt ourselves to be in an idiotic position. It was essential to gain an idea of the situation for ourselves, which we attempted by sending out scouts in various directions.

What we saw on approaching the Dnieper east of Yartsevo increased our alarm: deserted positions, unmanned trenches. We knew that in our rear an army of the Reserve Front had been deployed along the Dnieper. What had happened to it and where it was now was anybody's guess.

On the way to Vyazma we met logistical units of the 30th and 22nd Armies. The men declared in one voice that German paratroopers had broken up their units, they themselves had managed to get out and were seeking their own units. We also saw many refugees with chattels piled high on horse carts.

These accounts as well as reconnaissance data threw some light on the state of affairs. Evidently enemy panzer and motorised troops had succeeded in breaking through in the 19th and 30th Armies' sectors and penetrating deeply to the east. The refugees named Sychovka, Pigulino, Kholm-Zhirkovsky and other villages, claiming that they had all been taken by large German forces with many tanks and other materiel. All these villages were located north of the Yartsevo-Vyazma road, and the apparent conclusion was that this was a wedge driven in by the enemy. The next thing would be a turn to cut the highway and encircle our troops.

We did not meet any organised units and were still unable to contact the Front Headquarters. The feeling of isolation was oppressive. Greatly worried about the situation to the south of the main road, Malinin and I halted by a hay-rick to wait for our scouts to return. Lobachov with several officers went ahead. He returned in not more than an hour, and sat down with us on a pile of hay.

"I met Vasily Sokolovsky at the road crossing. There's no one left in Kasnya. But our orders, he said, remain unchanged."

It was Lobachov's opinion that the Chief of Staff of the Front himself had only a very vague idea of what was going on.

Our scouts still failed to discover any troops in the Vyazma area. Where could the divisions promised in Konev's orders be? This was the thought that hammered in my head as I made my way to our new Command Post.

We found it almost completely deployed for action. The signallers had their sets going but Front Headquarters was silent: perhaps it was still on the march and had not yet set up its radio station. We could not contact any of the units either.

Having instructed Malinin to locate the troops and get in touch with the Front or GHQ, I drove together with Lobachov to Vyazma. General I. S. Nikitin, the garrison commander, reported:

"There are no troops stationed in Vyazma or its suburbs. All I have is the police force. The situation in the town is tense and rumours are spreading of German tanks coming up from the south and even southeast, from Yukhnov."

"Where are the local government and Party officials?"

"In the cathedral, with the authorities for the whole region."

The cathedral stood on a hill overlooking Vyazma, like an ancient castle. In the basement we found the Secretary of the Smolensk Regional Party Committee, D. M. Popov, in the company of officials of the Smolensk and Vyazma city Party committees. Also present was D. A. Lestev, Head of the Political Department of the Western Front, who hailed us joyfully.

"Everything is all right, comrades," he said to the civilians around him. "Meet the Commanding General. . . ."

Unfortunately I had to disappoint them, for I was a commander with no one to command. I made General Nikitin report to the Party authorities all he knew about the troops and situation in the Vyazma area. Lestev was greatly surprised.

"I can't understand it," he said. "I've only just come back from Front Headquarters, which is moving to a new location. They assured me you had here no less than five divisions awaiting the arrival of the Sixteenth Army Headquarters."

This was the afternoon of October 6. Before I could ask Nikitin what was being done to ensure reconnaissance and observation of the city approaches, the mayor of Smolensk Vakhterov rushed into the basement crying, "German tanks are in the city!"

"Who reported that?"

"I saw them myself from the belfry!"

"Comrade Lobachov, please have the cars ready."

Accompanied by Lestev and Popov, I climbed hastily to the top of the belfry. The panzers were there, sure enough, machine-gunning cars escaping out of the city. German tanks were entering Vyazma, and we had to get out while we could. Just then there was no one to defend the city.

My ZIS-101 was a spacious sedan and, bundling the whole crowd into it and Lobachov's and Popov's cars, we drove safely out of the city. At one point we almost ran head-on into a tank, but our driver swung into a sidestreet before it could open fire.

The Command Post was situated in a grove about ten kilometres northeast of Vyazma. The first thing we did was to assess the situation from the information the staff had succeeded in collecting. The Germans had struck in their favourite manner, penetrating the front in two directions and joining the wedges in depth to form an inner encircling ring, and Vyazma was the pincers' meeting point. This much we knew, having seen it with our own eyes; reconnaissance confirmed it. The question now was where the enemy would try to establish the outer encircling ring. We had to find this out.

In the evening of October 6, General G. K. Malandin, Chief of the Front Operations Department, arrived at our CP with General Kamera. They were looking for Front HQ and had no idea of the situation. I told them all we had been able to establish and advised them to try and make their way eastward under cover of night, keeping north of the highway. I detailed a group of officers as a security guard for the two generals. They got the generals through safely, but ran into Germans on the way back. Two officers were wounded, the car was set on fire and they had to do the rest of the journey on foot.

Malinin reported that he had failed to locate any Soviet divisions in the Vyazma area. We had to decide what to do in our more than strange position. Return to our troops? But the enemy was tightening the inner ring and had made this impossible. The main thing, though, was that the 16th Army Headquarters had been designated for a mission, and we were duty bound to report and find out what it was.

Towards evening on October 6, our headquarters unit moved to a forest northeast of Vyazma and north of the Vyazma-Mozhaisk road. Our former positions had been spotted by the German aircraft.

All night and the whole of the following day we kept scouts busy in various directions. They established that the road east of Vyazma was firmly straddled by enemy armour; Vyazma itself was occupied by motorised infantry; enemy troops were streaming along the road to Sychovka. Tumanovo had not yet been taken, and there we found a cavalry squadron of NKVD troops, which gladly joined us.

The information that to the west the enemy had established a front straddling all the roads was confirmed.

In a deserted dugout in the Tumanovo woods I held a council of war with my closest associates. The consensus was

that we could not wait any longer. There was no hope of any forces coming up from the east, therefore we were in no position to help the surrounded troops. We ourselves were caught between the inner and outer encirclement rings, which the Germans were tightening rapidly.

My final decision was to break through to the northeast, where the enemy's lines were probably thinnest and we were more likely to meet friendly troops breaking out of encirclement. We would start out after dark on October 7.

There had been a time when we used to collect scattered officers and men, organise and encourage them, saying that when a commander acts with integrity and the Communists and Komsomols stand firm, the men perform their duty to the country with distinction and overcome all difficulties. Now it was our turn to prove this for ourselves.

All personnel were organised into units; commanders were appointed. We were to move in three columns: the main under my own command, the one on the right under General Kazakov, and the second echelon, which included all our motor transport, under Colonel Oryol. The armoured cars and BT-7 tanks were to keep close behind the main column so that I could have them handy in case of an encounter with the enemy. We organised security on the march and reconnaissance, in which the NKVD cavalry squadron with its greater mobility proved extremely useful. Everyone except the drivers had to walk.

Lobachov assembled all the officers and men around the headquarters bus for final instructions: on no account scatter in small groups; march and fight in a body, remembering the army rule of all for one and one for all; no abandoning of wounded under any circumstances; killed to be taken along or, if this was impossible, buried.

The men's faces in the dusk could not be seen, but we felt that they understood and trusted us. The war had taught us many lessons.

We moved off in complete darkness. Heavy rain turned the country roads into a bog. From time to time we stopped for stragglers to catch up, and to arrange the columns. We had a hundred or so cars and trucks, and they gave us a lot of trouble, sticking in the mud and having to be pulled out by tanks.

The first halt was planned at a village fifteen kilometres away. On the approaches to it our scouts, and then the advance party, encountered German cyclists and infantry in

two trucks. There was a brief skirmish in which our men, supported by two tanks, made short work of the enemy. The Germans fled, leaving their dead, one damaged truck and several motorcycles. Our main forces did not take part in the engagement.

Once in a while our patrols exchanged fire with small groups of Germans to the right or left. This kept people on the alert, without causing confusion.

In one village—I don't remember its name—we halted for a brief rest and a meal. (Incidentally, at Tumanovo, where the cavalry squadron had joined us, several food trains had been trapped at the station; we had loaded all we could into our trucks and blown up the rest.)

Lobachov, Malinin, several other staff officers and I entered one of the houses. The owners were obviously alarmed, but they welcomed us hospitably. A small boy ran in.

"Well, young scout, what news?"

He shyly said that that evening three German tanks and five truckloads of soldiers had passed through the village. Our hostess added that refugees from Novo-Dugino and Tyosovo, some fifteen kilometres to the north, had reported the area to be swarming with enemy armour and trucks.

She was interrupted by a man's voice coming from a dark corner: "Comrade Commander, what's going on, eh?"

I turned and peered at a bed in the corner. A grey-bearded old man (the woman's father, it turned out) was lying there. Looking at me intently he said in a voice filled with pain and bitterness.

"Comrade Commander.... You're getting away yourselves and leaving us behind. We've given all we had to help the Red Army, we'd spare the last shirt from our back if it would help. I'm an old soldier myself, I fought the Germans, and we didn't let them into Russia. What are you doing now?"

I remember these words to this day. They were like a slap in the face; my companions, too, were depressed.

Of course, we tried to explain that the setbacks were temporary and we would return, but I was not at all confident we had reassured the old veteran, twice wounded in the First World War and now bedridden. "If I were well," he said as we were leaving, "I'd go and defend Russia myself."

Walking at the head of the column, I kept thinking of the old farmer and his family and the trials and hardships

facing them. His rebuke was certainly justified. These thoughts sharpened my distress at the disaster that had befallen the Soviet people.

We crossed a field, and the main column entered a forest again. Our scouts reported troops of the 18th Infantry *Opolcheniye* (Home Guard) Division north of us and moving eastward. I ordered it to join us, assigning it the task of joint action in case of an encounter with the enemy.

Now our group represented a sizeable force capable of breaking through in any direction. The *opolcheniye* men were very glad to be with us, though it must be said that they had not lost their head in a tough situation, and had been in a fighting mood even before we met. They were Muscovites and they knew how to stand up for themselves and the common cause. It was not for nothing that in the Battle of Moscow the 18th *Opolcheniye* Division, after a brief but well thought out spell of training under the experienced General Pyotr Chernyshov, a hero of the defence of Smolensk, was given the title of Guards Division.

Dawn was approaching. We had covered no less than thirty kilometres over difficult, sodden roads that sapped our strength tremendously, when I received a report that a U-2 "hedgehopper" had landed in a field three kilometres away. I dispatched Colonel Baranchuk, Chief of the Army Air Force, to investigate. He returned shortly with the heartening news that our troops were holding Gzhatsk, and Voroshilov and Molotov had been there only the day before. Baranchuk was so glad about it that he had omitted to bring the pilot with him or even question him in any detail. I told him to fetch the pilot, but the plane had already taken off, for some reason heading westward.

The news spread swiftly among our people, and everyone wanted to press on to Gzhatsk, only ten kilometres away, in the trucks. The men were certainly worn out. Dawn was breaking and we could be spotted from afar, so I decided that we should all proceed on wheels to the bridge at Gzhatsk. I took the precaution of reinforcing the advance detachment with two tanks and an armoured car. The cavalry were detailed to reconnoiter the area north of the town and find the fords and crossings across the River Gzhat. The *opolcheniye* units moved in the second echelon, providing security on the west and south.

Lobachov was all for hastening on.

"I may still find Voroshilov there," he said.

I allowed him to join the advance detachment, but only in the armoured car and on condition that he did not expose himself needlessly.

The staff and headquarters units stretched out along the road in a long column. Fired by the understandable desire to cross the river as quickly as possible and join our main forces, the column gradually speeded up till, near the bridge, we all but trod on the advance detachment's tail. At that moment a ring of smoke shot up over the trees ahead of us, then came an explosion.

It is hard to say what considerations guided us, but the cars with me at the head of the column dashed forward. As we drove out into the open we immediately came under fire from heavy machine-guns and tank guns.

We scattered into a skirmish line. After a hasty appraisal of the situation I ordered some of the troops in the column to reinforce the advance detachment, already fighting on the western bank of the Gzhat; the trucks to drive off the road and camouflage; the 18th Division to pin the enemy down with one regiment and try to break through with its main forces a good distance further north.

What had happened was this. One of the BT-7s (armoured troop carriers) of the advance detachment had gone on ahead and hit an antitank mine at the bridge over the River Gzhat. As the detachment came up behind it, it had been met by enemy machine-gun fire. Lobachov's armoured car was pierced by a slug shell (we found it afterwards inside the vehicle). The detachment dismounted and went into action. The bridge turned out to have been blown up.

At this point we arrived—just in the nick of time, so it transpired, for the Germans, seeing our small numbers, made an attempt to cross the river, which we beat back.

The pilot of the U-2 had given us false information that had led us straight into the enemy's hands; whether deliberately or not, I do not know.

The road along which we had hoped to reach friendly troops was straddled by the enemy. It was hopeless attempting to ford the Gzhat without special equipment and useless to carry on a drawn-out battle as the enemy would be able to concentrate superior forces and make short work of us.

We left a few temporary covering detachments at Gzhatsk while our main forces, unnoticed by the enemy, turned and leapfrogged northwards. Even when we had put a considerable distance between us and Gzhatsk, we could

still hear the rumble of bombs from the town. German aircraft passed overhead at a great height without molesting us.

We continued on our way, scattering small enemy detachments and avoiding large groupings, picking up anyone who had got through the interior front of investment, which was apparently not yet very tight because the enemy was concentrating his efforts on the main routes.

Eventually we discovered fords across the Gzhat, and in the early hours of October 9 crossed safely to the other bank. I do not describe all the incidents and skirmishes with the Germans and the capturing and holding of the crossings. Moving eastward, we soon slipped out of the closing enemy pincers.

It was only when we reached the forests north of Uvarovka—forty kilometres from Mozhaisk—that we finally got in touch with Front Headquarters and received orders to report in the neighbourhood of Mozhaisk.

That same day two U-2 planes came for me and Lobachov. I left Malinin instructions concerning the march to the new location and turned to go. Malinin caught me by the arm.

"Take the order about handing over the sector and troops to Yershakov," he said.

I asked why.

"It may come in handy. You never can tell. . . ."

In the cottage occupied by the Front Headquarters we were greeted by Voroshilov, Molotov, Konev and Bulganin.

"How did you come to be at Vyazma with your headquarters—but without the troops of the Sixteenth Army?" Voroshilov inquired as soon as the preliminaries were over.

"The Front Commander said the units I was to take over would be waiting there."

"Strange. . . ."

I showed Marshal Voroshilov the order signed by Konev and Bulganin.

A heated conversation ensued between the Marshal and Konev and Bulganin. Then he summoned General G. K. Zhukov, who came in at once.

"This is the new Commander of the Western Front," Voroshilov said, turning to us. "He will give you your new assignment."

Voroshilov listened to our brief report, thanked us on behalf of the Government and Supreme Command and wished us success in repulsing the enemy.

Soon I was summoned to General Zhukov. He was calm and stern, and one suspected the working of a strong will beneath the outward calm.

He had assumed a burden of tremendous responsibility. The fact was that by the time we had come out at Mozhaisk the Commander of the Western Front had hardly any troops to speak of at his disposal; hardly enough to halt the enemy advance on Moscow.

At first Zhukov ordered us to take over the Mozhaisk sector. This was on October 11. Then a new order came, instructing us to move with our staff and the 18th Infantry Division to the neighbourhood of Volokolamsk, subordinate anyone we found there and organise the defence along the line between the "Sea of Moscow" (a water reservoir on the Volga) on the north, and Ruza, on the south.

Events were developing rapidly.

We arrived at Volokolamsk on October 14; on the 16th, German armour attacked our Army's left flank.

THE VOLOKOLAMSK SECTOR

By October 14, the overall situation on the Western Front was grave indeed. The enemy was advancing on Moscow, and it required titanic efforts by the Party, the Government and the Supreme Command to remove the threat that loomed over the nation's capital. Once again the Soviet people, guided by the Communist Party, demonstrated what they were capable of in times of stress. Everything was done to bar the road to the enemy troops. The General Headquarters rushed units from the Moscow area to the battlefront; divisions were hastily transferred from other sectors, Central Asia and the Soviet Far East. We realised that Western Front Command expected an all-out effort from us, too.

The situation we found at Volokolamsk was very much like what I had experienced in July at Yartsevo, with one important difference. Then I had arrived at a threatened sector with only a handful of officers whom I hardly knew, without means of communication, etc.; now I had a well-knit staff, fully equipped and capable of rapidly establishing communications and control. My staff officers had benefited by the tough situations we had faced. They worked well together and understood each other at a word. Lobachov, Kazakov, Oryol and I spent most of the time with the troops, at the forward line of our overextended defences, studying the terrain and, as far as possible in so short a time, the divisions and their personnel. I knew the Chief of Staff and his subordinates did not waste a single minute of their time.

No less effective were the Political Department personnel under D. F. Romanov. They were staunch, seasoned Bolsheviks capable of rallying the Party and Komsomol organisations for any worthy cause, of inspiring heroism.

All this was tremendously important in the complex and responsible task assigned to us.

On setting up our Command Post in Volokolamsk, we

immediately dispatched teams of staff and political officers in all directions to seek out all the troops in the area and intercept units, groups and individual soldiers breaking out of encirclement.

One of the first to emerge from encirclement north of Volokolamsk was General Lev Dovator's 3rd Cavalry Corps. It was placed under the operational control of the 16th Army. The corps comprised two cavalry divisions: General I. A. Pliyev's 50th, and Brigade Commander K. S. Melnik's 53rd. Before joining us the cavalrymen had fought on the River Mezha. On being ordered to withdraw to the Front reserves for replenishments, they had headed for Osuga Station, 30 kilometres south of Rzhev, but had found all the roads straddled by enemy motorised and panzer units. They had been fighting their way out of the pocket, till they finally joined us on October 13.

Despite substantial losses, the 3rd Cavalry Corps was a force to be reckoned with. Its officers and men had done a lot of fighting and knew the sound of bullets. The command and political personnel had benefited by their combat experience and knew what cavalry could do, as well as the strong and weak points of the enemy. Especially valuable in the circumstances was the corps' high mobility, making it possible to utilise it for manoeuvring on threatened directions—with reinforcing means, of course, as otherwise the horsemen would have been in no position to fight with enemy tanks.

I was favourably impressed by Lev Dovator, a young, cheerful, and at the same time serious man, of whom I had heard earlier from Marshal Timoshenko. You could see that he knew his job well. The very fact that he had succeeded in leading the corps out of encirclement in fighting trim was an indication of his courage and talent as a commander. One could be sure that the corps would carry out its assignment intelligently, and it was certainly a formidable assignment. The corps had to defend an extensive frontage north of Volokolamsk up to the Volga Reservoir.

To the left of the cavalry was deployed a combined cadet regiment under Colonel S. I. Mladentsev and Commissar A. Y. Slavkin recruited from one of Moscow's leading cadet schools, the Kremlin Cadet School. It had been hastily moved from Solnechnogorsk to the neighbourhood of Volokolamsk where it proceeded to mount defences along the eastern bank of the River Lama.

When Alexei Lobachov heard that Kremlin cadet units were joining us he got so excited that I couldn't help letting him visit them at once. His life as a soldier had begun in the Kremlin Cadet School. It was worth seeing the happiness on his face when he described how, in 1921, he had stood guard at sentry post No. 27—Lenin's flat.

Lobachov returned with the news that the cadets were in high spirits and eager for action. "A good, reliable regiment," he commented.

He was right. Colonel Mladentsev and his regiment showed their worth in the very first engagements.

The left flank, defending Volokolamsk from the west and southwest up to the River Ruza, was held by the 316th Infantry Division, newly arrived from the Front reserve. Its Commander was General I. V. Panfilov, its Commissar, S. A. Yegorov. It was a long time since we had seen such a full-blooded division, in respect of both strength and logistic support. The commanders were mostly regular officers, the political instructors had been chosen from among the leading Party workers and local government activists of Kazakhstan. While it was being built up the division had received considerable assistance from the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan.

On October 14, I called on General Panfilov at his Command Post and discussed his division's tasks. I was greatly impressed by Panfilov, finding him to be an intelligent commander with a definite fund of knowledge and wide practical experience. Every suggestion he made was well grounded. He had a plain, open face, and his apparent initial shyness could not conceal his inherent vitality, indomitable will and persistence of purpose. Panfilov spoke favourably of his subordinates, and you could see that he really knew them all.

It is often difficult to size up a man at once, to determine his worth and capabilities. General Panfilov was an outgoing, likeable man. I took to him at first sight—and was not mistaken.

In preparing for combat it is essential to study the characters of one's subordinate commanders. Why? Because these different characters also constitute the higher commander's reserve. This is a delicate task, and we were much too short of time.

I also liked General Panfilov's calm humour. In summing up the situation on the sector from Bolychevo to the River

Ruza held by one of his regiments, he remarked, "We're sure sitting on spikes here," having in mind the fact that when the troops arrived all they found in place of the expected fortifications were the stakes marking them; the builders had not had time to do more. Now we were taking all possible steps to prepare at least field-type fortifications before the enemy offensive began.

From our estimation of the terrain, we judged that the enemy would most likely direct his main effort against the left flank of the 316th Division. Together with General Panfilov, we of the Army Command gave our main attention to this sector, especially to the organisation of antitank defence in depth. The staff and services commanders helped the troops in word and in deed, passing on the experience gained in past battles.

In every engagement the enemy had exploited his overwhelming superiority in armour, and it was this we had to be prepared for. We planned to use all available artillery against enemy armour, but since we were obviously short of artillery we made careful plans for extensive manoeuvring in terms of both fire and position shifting. We made provisions for redeployment of artillery to threatened sectors, determined and reconnoitered movement routes. Vasily Kazakov and his officers helped the division commanders and artillery officers organise the utilisation of ordnance, including AA and *katyushas,* for combating tanks from whatever quarter they might appear.

Every battery and individual gun attached for tank protection to infantry or dismounted cavalry was assigned special infantry units for defence against German submachine-gunners; these were fully subordinated to the commander of the battery or gun they were assigned to protect. This measure was introduced in the 16th Army on the basis of combat experience, and it fully justified itself.

We also set up mobile detachments of engineers with mines and demolition charges, carried in trucks or horse-carts, with the task of sealing off tank-threatened directions and preventing tanks from penetrating our defences. We had antitank ditches dug and mined, at the regimental boundaries and gaps. Notably, the 1075th Regiment of Panfilov's division protected its left flank with a four-kilometre ditch in which were planted four thousand mines. Defence works were launched along the whole of the 16th Army's almost 100-kilometre frontage.

Along with the strengthening of fortified defences a great deal was done to strengthen morale among the troops. This work aimed at fostering a firm resolve in one and all to hold the defensive lines without a single thought of retreat. I must say that much was achieved in this sense. The realisation that we were entrusted with the task of defending the approaches to Moscow multiplied our strength.

Our troops were well aware of the selfless devotion with which the men and women of Moscow were toiling at the factories. Working without rest or respite, they had turned the capital into an arsenal supplying the front with weapons and ammunition. We saw for ourselves the enthusiasm with which Muscovites erected antitank obstacles, planted "dragon's teeth", etc. Even in those tense and trying days we kept up our contacts with Moscow factory collectives. The very word "Moscow" meant a lot to all of us, from the highest commander to rank-and-file soldier; it meant all we had ever fought for, all we had achieved in building up our workers' and peasants' state.

The Moscow Party organisation gave the 16th Army tremendous help. It fielded dozens of tank destroyer companies and battalions from Moscow volunteers who brought new blood to an army that had been depleted in continuous intense fighting.

The Chief of the Moscow Militia, V. N. Romanchenko, called me up to ask whether a militia detachment would come in handy for action at the front, and I gratefully accepted the offer. Soon a large, excellently equipped detachment made up of volunteers from Moscow's militia force arrived at Volokolamsk. We used it for operations behind the enemy lines, and for a long time it gave us invaluable service.

Our neighbour was General V. A. Khomenko's 30th Army, which was retreating under enemy pressure north of the Moscow Reservoir. We were unable to establish communications with it right up to the time when we engaged the enemy. On the left, southeast of Bolychevo, our neighbour was the 5th Army, at first under General D. D. Lelyushenko, then General L. A. Govorov, with whom we had stable communications.

Our numerical weakness compelled us to deploy all our large units in the forward echelon, and each had a wide frontage to defend.

In the reserve we had an infantry regiment of the 126th Division, which had come out of encirclement intact. We counted upon activating it as a full-blooded formation with reinforcements from our assembly point. The 18th *Opolcheniye* Division was also withdrawn to the reserve to be reinforced. Of course, all the units of the reserve were constantly on the alert.

The Army was reinforced with two tank-destroyer regiments, two heavy gun regiments, two battalions of the Moscow Artillery School, and two regiments and three battalions of rocket launchers. By the standards of the time we had quite a lot of artillery—but remember our 100-kilometre frontage!

In the morning of October 16, the enemy struck with panzer and motorised units at our Army's left flank—just where we had expected him and had made our most careful preparations.

On this sector alone the enemy concentrated four divisions—two infantry and two panzer—totalling more than 200 tanks. The main blow was struck at Panfilov's 316th Division, whose forward lines were some 12 to 15 kilometres from the Volokolamsk Highway. The nazis committed to battle powerful groups of 30 to 50 tanks followed by dense skirmish lines of infantry and supported by artillery fire and air strikes. On encountering well-organised resistance the enemy withdrew, only to renew his attacks again. Suffering heavy losses, he was forced to commit fresh troops to action. Gradually the fighting spread along the whole frontage of the 16th Army.

On October 17, General Dovator's corps was attacked north of Volokolamsk. The same day the Germans threw about 100 tanks against a regiment of the 316th Division at the boundary with the 5th Army and succeeded in pushing back the defenders and capturing two villages.

Seeking to exploit the success in depth, the Germans continued to build up pressure, but were met by artillery brought over from other sections and thrown back, suffering heavy losses in armour.

Neither did the enemy achieve success in the sector occupied by the dismounted cavalry, and all his attacks were beaten back.

On October 18, the enemy, bent on achieving success at whatever cost, brought some 150 tanks and a motorised infantry regiment into action against the 316th Division in

the direction of Ignatkovo, Zhilino, Ostashino. Antitank artillery, gun batteries and rocket launchers were rushed to meet this iron flood, but when another hundred or so enemy tanks appeared in the neighbourhood of Zhilino on the southern bank of the Ruza I was compelled to bring into action, first our immediate, and then the whole of the Army artillery reserves. This artillery manoeuvring saved the situation.

As a result of two days' fighting (October 18 and 19) all the enemy achieved was a slight territorial gain at the expense of General Panfilov's division, but at such a prohibitive price in armour and manpower that he was forced to call off his offensive.

Our casualties were also substantial. Artillery, infantry, engineers and signallers had all displayed feats of mass heroism in repelling the enemy. Artillery crews had continued to fire from damaged guns. Infantry had fought tanks with hand grenades and incendiary bottles. The infantry units defending the guns had died together with the crews rather than leave them in the lurch. Signallers had established and restored communication lines under fierce enemy fire.

Now and again the enemy had been compelled to vary his armour tactics. At one point he had tried using tanks in small groups off the roads, but our artillery had been prepared for this and had dealt with them.

The respite was not a long one. Fighting soon began again, with attacks following in wave after wave. Though active along the whole front, the enemy continued to concentrate on the Volokolamsk sector, bringing in more and more fresh units. In face of overwhelming superiority, our troops gradually fell back. A powerful panzer force hammered its way towards the Volokolamsk Highway. All attacks were continuously supported from the air.

By October 25, the enemy had captured Bolychevo and Ostashevo and crossed the Ruza. The railway station at Volokolamsk was taken in a battle in which the enemy used 125 tanks.

In the ten days of fighting, from October 16 to 25, our Army had suffered substantial losses in artillery. The situation was very grave. General Vasily Kazakov and his artillerymen had surpassed themselves, but there is a limit to everything. The moment came when Kazakov reported that we did not have enough artillery to oppose even the armour

already committed to action by the enemy—and reconnaissance data and POW statements indicated that new panzer units had appeared before us. The Army had to be reinforced with artillery at all costs.

Reluctantly I called up the Front Commander, General Zhukov. I had foreseen that the conversation would be an unpleasant one, and was not mistaken. After listening in stoic silence to all that Zhukov had to say about my performance as a commander, I nevertheless insisted on my request, and in the morning of October 26 two regiments of 37-mm AA guns arrived in the Army. This was at least something, and besides, there was no doubt that at the time Zhukov certainly did not have a single battery to spare.

Both regiments were immediately handed over to Panfilov to shore up the antitank defences of his sector.

The enemy continued to build up pressure at Volokolamsk. The 316th Division was faced with at least two panzer divisions in addition to infantry, so I decided on a limited redeployment to strengthen the Army's left flank. General Dovator's corps was transferred swiftly from its positions at the Volga Reservoir, where it was replaced by the partially reinforced 126th and 18th Infantry Divisions.

Meanwhile, to the north the enemy's advance continued; on October 14 he took Kalinin, forced back the right-flank units of the 30th Army and penetrated far to the east along the northern shore of the Moscow Reservoir, thus threatening my own right flank. As I see it, the General Staff made an error of judgment in establishing the boundary between the Western and Kalinin Fronts (the latter was created on October 19); instead of demarcating it along such a major geographical feature as the Volga Reservoir, it was established somewhat to the south, with the result that the 30th Army was cut in half by the reservoir.

The nazis also succeeded in forcing back the right flank of our other neighbour, the 5th Army. They took Mozhaisk and Ruza, advancing eastward on the sector adjoining our defences, and skirted Volokolamsk from the south.

After several days of stubborn fighting, the cadet regiment holding defences north of Volokolamsk retreated eastward from the line of the River Lama, thus yielding another salient. Finally, on October 27, after throwing in large panzer and infantry forces supported by artillery and aircraft, the enemy took Volokolamsk. However, his attempt to cut the road to Istra, east of the city, was repulsed by the

decisive actions of General Pliyev's cavalry division which had arrived with supporting artillery and deployed in the nick of time.

It was in this bloody fighting for Volokolamsk and to the east of it that Panfilov's division covered itself with immortal glory. Its soldiers proudly called themselves "Panfilovites", and in the Army the 316th Division became known as the "Panfilov Division". Fortunate indeed is the general who has earned the love and faith of his men, so ingenuously expressed.

Colonel Mladentsev's cadets also fought with distinction. It was these infantry troops and the supporting artillery units that stopped the enemy advance despite his tremendous superiority. The Germans suffered great losses, especially in armour, and were forced to pause to regroup and bring up fresh forces.

The fighting at and for Volokolamsk has become textbook history. Many books have been written about it and there is no need to repeat them. Every man, from the rank and file in the trenches to the army commander, did all he could to prevent the enemy from penetrating the Army's defences. And he was prevented.

The nazi forces, their strength sapped in the fighting at Volokolamsk and to the north, ground to a halt. For several days we engaged only in local fighting.

According to our own observations, reconnaissance data and other information, the German Command, having tested the strength of our defences, was preparing a new strike. Fresh troops were pouring into the Volokolamsk-Istra sector, and to the north regrouping movements were observed.

At about this time General I. V. Boldin and several officers came out of encirclement in our sector. He told us of the fate of the troops of the Western and Reserve Fronts encircled west of Vyazma (the 19th, 20th, 24th and 32nd Armies, including the units we had been ordered, on October 5, to hand over to F. A. Yershakov). These units had lost contact with the higher command, and, left completely to themselves, had had to fight their way east with great difficulty to join friendly troops.

Boldin himself, with a small group of officers and men, had made his way eastward through forests. They had with them wounded General Mikhail Lukin and had been determined to carry him out of encirclement. One night, however, they had been ambushed by German submachine-gunners and

forced to scatter. That tragic night they lost Lukin. Later we found out that, gravely wounded, he had been taken prisoner.

Boldin left us for Moscow. He soon became one of the heroes of the capital's defence on the left wing of the Western Front.

Our troops used the respite we had wrung from the enemy to strengthen our defences, while engaging in minor scuffles.

Intelligence reports informed us that large enemy forces were concentrating in the Volokolamsk sector and on the 16th Army's right flank. We could expect an assault at any day. At headquarters we racked our brains for ways of improving our positions. The upshot of this was the idea of the Skirmanovo Operation, a very risky undertaking which we nevertheless succeeded in pulling off.

At the end of October and beginning of November, the Germans captured several villages on our left flank, among them Skirmanovo, forming a salient threatening the Volokolamsk-Istra road from the south. The road was constantly under artillery fire and liable to be cut at any moment, with the enemy coming out in the rear of our Army's main forces. It was essential to knock the enemy out of Skirmanovo and remove this threat while possible. The task was assigned to General Pliyev's 50th Cavalry Division, Colonel P. N. Chernyshov's 18th Infantry Division, and M. Y. Katukov's armour brigade, which had recently joined us. They were supported by several artillery units and rocket-launcher battalions.

The operation was conceived in the teeth of the enemy offensive. We were driven to it by sheer necessity. At the same time, though, these very considerations could be turned to our advantage, as the German Command could hardly expect us to risk such an operation. Malinin, Kazakov, Oryol and all the other officers worked with a will, drawing up the plan of operations and preparing the units. The arrival on the Army's right flank of the cavalry divisions which the Front Commander had promised me earlier gave us additional encouragement.

The fighting for Skirmanovo, which lasted from November 11 to 14, was highly successful. Our artillery, mortars and rocket launchers inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy, and the consorted action of infantry supported by armour clinched the operation. Important contributions to the success of the venture were made by a strong group of *opol-*

cheniye submachine-gunners who penetrated behind the enemy lines at night before the attack, and the cavalry of General Pliyev who executed a turning movement on the German flank and struck at their rear echelons. True, after the raid these daring riders had to fight their way out but they were used to operating behind enemy lines, and carried out their difficult task with courage and skill.

The German troops occupying Skirmanovo and neighbouring villages were routed completely. The 10th Panzer Division, which had been poised to cut the Volokolamsk Highway, retreated with heavy losses. The battlefield was littered with some 50 damaged and gutted tanks, many artillery pieces, including 150-mm guns, mortars and hundreds of trucks.

I viewed the battlefield in the company of Alexei Lobachov and Vladimir Stavsky, the *Pravda* correspondent. Stavsky was more than just a newspaper correspondent who went into admiring raptures over the sight of blasted German implements of war. He was with the men of the 16th Army in the most hectic days, even in the inferno at Spas-Ryukhovskoye. It was there that the 289th Antitank Regiment, alerted in the middle of the night, manned the defences and its commander, Major Yefremenko, ordered one hundred shells to be laid out at each gun. Stavsky was at Yefremenko's side in that engagement. Incidentally, Vasily Kazakov, who was at the regimental OP at the time, told me about this over the telephone. To my question what Stavsky was doing, he said, "Right now he's counting the Junkers pounding us.... He's got to twenty-seven."

After Skirmanovo we had twenty-four hours left at our disposal, though, of course, we did not know it at the time. Nevertheless, we sensed that new and grim trials were awaiting us in the battle for our capital and hastily prepared for the imminent fighting.

The 16th Army received replenishments before the decisive struggles. The 17th, 20th, 24th and 44th Cavalry Divisions from Central Asia (each numbering 3,000 effectives) constituted the second echelon. By the time they arrived the ground had frozen and ice covered the marshes, but the horses had not been reshod for the winter, and this hampered the cavalry's movement. In addition, the officers and men lacked experience of action in broken, marshy and wooded country.

We were greatly cheered by the arrival of the 78th

Infantry Division from Siberia, led by that fine commander Colonel Afanasy Beloborodov. It was made up mainly of Siberians, and even among our gallant soldiers Siberians have always been distinguished for their valour. The division was fully manned and supplied according to the wartime tables of organisation and equipment. The timeliness of their arrival can hardly be overestimated. Just as at Volokolamsk General Panfilov's division had played a crucial part in the fighting, so, in November, Colonel Beloborodov's division contributed tremendously to the decisive battles for Moscow.

We also received two tank brigades, sadly underequipped, and the 58th Tank Division—with hardly any tanks at all. The Army's artillery was also somewhat replenished.

The enemy nevertheless continued to enjoy overwhelming superiority, especially in armour and aircraft.

The November defensive battles were preceded by an event which I feel I must describe. Quite unexpectedly, we received orders from the Commander of the Western Front to strike at the enemy's Volokolamsk group from a sector north of the town. We were given one night to prepare for the operation. I must say that I was unable to fathom the Commander's reasoning in issuing the order. Our strength was minimal, we were given practically no time for preparation, and the enemy himself was poised for the attack. My request at least to give us more time for preparation remained unheeded.

As expected, the partial counteroffensive launched on November 16 on orders from the Front Command proved ineffectual. At first, having taken the enemy by surprise, we succeeded in penetrating some three kilometres into his positions. But then he launched an attack along the whole of our frontage, and our troops were forced to beat a hasty retreat. Most hard put was Lev Dovator's cavalry group, which was caught in an enemy pincer movement. It was only thanks to their mobility and the skill of their commander that they managed to escape encirclement.

While preparing for this operation we had transferred the Army CP to Teryaeva Sloboda, where we were heavily bombed by enemy aircraft. The Operations and Intelligence sections suffered most. We shifted Army Headquarters to Novo-Petrovskoye, on the Volokolamsk-Moscow Highway. One of the considerations in choosing the place was information we had received that the enemy was concentrating

large armour forces opposite our left flank, and from here it would be more convenient to control the troops that were likely to bear the brunt of the attack.

Lobachov and I took advantage of the occasion (of the shifting of the headquarters) to drive to Moscow for a few hours. We found the city alerted, bristling with dragon's teeth and hedgehogs, with barricades on the outskirts and embrasures in the walls of houses. The capital was grim and calm.

On the approaches to Moscow tens of thousands of Muscovites, mostly women of all ages, were busy digging trenches, artillery positions and antitank ditches. They worked with concentration, and one felt that they fully realised the importance of what they were doing. We noticed neither confusion nor despondency. Despite the bad weather—a cold drizzle and dank mist—the work was going with a swing.

I confess that the sight of this mass of toilers digging into the tough earth with such calm persistence moved me to the bottom of my heart, and made my hatred of and anger against the enemy even fiercer. I glanced at Lobachov and read similar sentiments on his face. What was more, we realised that the whole army shared these feelings and that the forthcoming battle would be decisive, a turning point in the whole campaign. We were fully justified in our confidence by the experience of the October fighting at Volokolamsk, when the enemy, despite his great mechanical might, had been unable to break through our front. The fortitude of the troops in those battles had been unprecedented.

By the time we got back the staff had already been set up at Novo-Petrovskoye. The Military Council was quartered in the neighbouring village of Ustinovo. Communications were established with all the large units and neighbours on the right and left. Credit must be given to Colonel P. Y. Maksimenko for his inexhaustible energy, knowledge and highly developed sense of responsibility. He ensured reliable communications with the troops in the most difficult situations. All through the Battle of Moscow the signallers—privates, NCOs, officers—performed their military duty diligently, with the greatest devotion.

Here is another trait characteristic of those days. At Novo-Petrovskoye we were visited by Yemelyan Yaroslavsky with a group of propagandists from the Central Com-

mittee of the Communist Party. Yaroslavsky was a popular figure, and we arranged for people to come from every regiment to hear him speak; we knew they would take the Party's message to the troops.

The room was packed. Yaroslavsky stood out among the uniformed military in his civilian clothes. He said that instead of delivering a lecture or speech he would answer whatever questions we cared to ask. He was literally showered with questions. On the floor quite near him sat a group of Panfilov men in white camouflage suits, with submachine-guns in their hands.

By the beginning of the enemy offensive we had gathered some fairly accurate information about his troops. Opposite the 16th Army, the Germans had deployed the 5th Army Corps and 46th and 40th Motorised Corps of the 4th Panzer Group. North of Volokolamsk, the 106th and 35th Infantry Divisions occupied the line of departure. Opposite our Army's left flank, west and southeast of Volokolamsk, were deployed four panzer divisions—2nd, 11th, 5th and 10th—and Reich Motorised SS Division. We reported this to Front Headquarters on several occasions, but the people there were evidently inclined to regard our estimates of enemy forces as exaggerated. We could sympathise with them, of course. They would have preferred to hear that the enemy was not so strong; so should we. But prisoners taken at Skirmanovo and on other sectors confirmed our information. We had to face the facts and be prepared for the very worst; we could not afford to lull ourselves or the troops.

Dovator's corps was dispatched to reinforce our left flank. In case of need it could be swiftly manoeuvred to any threatened sector. On the left flank we deployed the 78th Infantry Division.

NOWHERE TO RETREAT

On November 16, after regrouping, bringing up fresh units and replenishing those that had taken part in the earlier fighting, the German Army Group Centre under von Bock launched the offensive along the whole front from Kalinin in the north to Tula in the south. In the north, the main effort was delivered in the zone of the 30th and 16th Armies and the right flank of the 5th Army (Volga Reservoir to Moscow-Mozhaisk Railway); in the south, it fell on the 50th Army sector (Tula, Novomoskovsk in the direction of Kashira). In our Army's zone the main effort was directed against the left flank, in the neighbourhood of Volokolamsk, defended by the 316th Division and the cadet regiment.

The attack began with the supporting fire of heavy artillery and mortar fire and air attacks. Bombers circled overhead, diving in turn and dropping bombs on our infantry and artillery positions. Then tanks in groups of 15 to 30 followed by dense skirmish lines of submachine-gunners were thrown into the battle, which I watched together with Lobachov from the Observation Post of General Panfilov's 316th Division.

The tanks advanced stubbornly, heedless of losses, halting occasionally to blast away at our antitank batteries. Some of them churned about in one place with damaged tracks, a dozen or so were burning or belching smoke, and we could see the nazis leaping out and dropping to the ground. Our fire forced the enemy submachine-gunners to take cover on the ground. Several German tanks managed to reach the trenches, where the fighting was intense.

Units of the 316th Division, the supporting artillery, and the few infantry support tanks we had, put up a fierce resistance. Quad mounted machine-guns and 37-mm anti-aircraft guns hit out at diving enemy aircraft. Every now and then, now here, now there, a German plane would go down in smoke and flames.

It was on that day that the twenty-eight heroes of Panfilov's division headed by political instructor Vasily Klochkov performed their world-famous exploit. Klochkov's words. "Russia is big, but there is nowhere to retreat, because Moscow is behind us," were taken up by the whole army and nation.

The progress of the battle and the fighting spirit of our troops made me confident that the enemy would never reach Moscow. The Division Commander, Ivan Panfilov, controlled his troops confidently, firmly, wisely. If things became too difficult, I reflected, it would only be necessary to help Panfilov with fresh forces, and he would know what to do with them without suggestions from above. It was with this conviction that I left his OP.

Lobachov made for the cadet regiment, where a fierce battle was also raging, while I drove to my main CP at Ustinovo so as to keep in touch with events developing along the Army's defence line. As I drove parallel to the frontlines I was attacked twice by German aircraft carhunting along the Volokolamsk-Moscow Highway. I halted several times to listen to the rumble of guns. The fighting had now spread to the sector held by the 18th Infantry Division.

By the time I arrived at headquarters a report on the situation was ready. The previous day the enemy had been active with small forces opposite the 30th Army. All his attacks were repulsed by the 107th Motorised Infantry Division, holding the defence at our boundary. In the morning of November 16 he resumed his offensive in greater force, but as yet there was no news of developments. Then Malinin reported that information had just come in from the 126th Division, on our right flank. Their neighbour was in trouble; the Germans had penetrated the boundary and the Commander of the 126th had been compelled to rush his reserve there, while he himself was repulsing the enemy's 14th Motorised Division with all means at his disposal.

Wave after wave battered the positions held by the cadet regiment. The 18th Infantry Division on Panfilov's left was staunchly repulsing the enemy, and so far our defences had not been penetrated anywhere. However, a grave situation began to develop on the boundary between the 18th and Panfilov's divisions, as the Germans brought in fresh forces, which we assumed to be the 5th Panzer Division. Later this

was confirmed when tanks painted yellow appeared on the battlefield: the division had been rushed to Moscow from Africa and thrown into action with such haste that the Germans had not even had time to repaint the camouflage. The situation compelled me to secure the threatened sector by deploying Pliyev's and Melnik's cavalry there, a measure which proved extremely timely.

We were greatly worried by the situation developing on the left flank of the 30th Army, especially when, towards evening, we lost contact with its headquarters. I requested the Front Commander to place under my command two cavalry and one armour division stationed in the zone of our Army west of Klin but assigned to the Front reserve. General Zhukov replied that on instructions from GHQ they had already been subordinated to the 30th Army, which as of November 17 was being handed over to the Western Front. This decision of the Supreme Command was a correct, albeit rather belated, one.

On November 17, the enemy continued to attack, throwing in fresh units. Frost had hardened the marshes and now the enemy's main strike forces—his panzer and motorised units—enjoyed greater freedom of action, which we quickly felt, as tanks began to operate off the roads, skirting villages and moving through brush and new forest growth. Whenever the enemy was unable to bypass our defences he concentrated tanks en masse, accompanying his attacks with heavy artillery and mortar fire and air bombardment. These tactics were a great nuisance to our troops, and we countered it by manoeuvring with roving batteries, guns and tanks that intercepted enemy tanks at point-blank range. Our engineers were of great help in combating the enemy's "roaming" armoured groups. They travelled in trucks and planted mines and ground bombs on expected routes of advance. I encouraged every display of useful initiative, and the results were excellent. The nazis drenched every inch of conquered ground with their blood, losing machines and impetus.

However, they were still powerful and continued to strike without respite. On November 18, opposite our left flank, where four panzer divisions and one motorised SS division were already engaged, units of the 252nd Infantry Division appeared. By bringing in additional forces, the enemy was able to push back the right-flank units of the 5th Army, penetrate the gap between the two armies and advance

towards the Volokolamsk-Moscow Highway, threatening to outflank us in depth.

It was at this critical moment that I sent Beloborodov's 78th Infantry Division into action against the nazi troops striking at the highway. Beloborodov quickly deployed his regiments, and they plunged into the attack. Charging at full height, the Siberians struck at the enemy's flank and threw him back. It was a beautiful assault and it saved us the day.

Their spirit roused by the fighting, the Siberians gave hot pursuit, and it was only by bringing in fresh units that the enemy was able to check the 78th's advance.

Fighting was also heavy on other sectors of the Army's defences. Enjoying great numerical superiority, mobility and constant support from the air, the enemy had no difficulty in organising strike forces in the course of the battle. Favoured by the frozen ground, they struck alternating blows in different places, achieving local success. As we lacked sufficient reserves in the rear echelons, we were compelled each time to withdraw forces from other sectors to prevent an enemy penetration on a threatened direction.

Gradually we were forced back, and in three days of continuous fighting units of the Army retreated between five and eight kilometres at various points. However, nowhere did the enemy succeed in penetrating our defences.

On November 18, when Panfilov's men were repulsing enemy wedges in our defences with the stubbornness of heroes, the general himself was killed at his OP. This was a terrible loss. Had Panfilov lived a few hours more he would have heard that the division he had led so gallantly into action had been accorded the title of Guards Division. The unparalleled heroism and courage of the officers and men of the 316th and the outstanding accomplishments of its commander were fittingly rewarded by the Party and the Government. Over the radio we heard a broadcast from Moscow announcing that the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. had awarded it the Order of the Red Banner and renamed it the 8th Guards Division. And at practically the same time we received the news of its commander's death. . . .

After three days of fighting the German Command evidently came to the conclusion that they would be unable to breach our defences on the Volokolamsk sector. Accordingly, while continuing their attacks and slowly pushing

back our units at a rate of two or three kilometres a day, they began preparing a determined assault south of the Volga Reservoir. The decision was probably additionally prompted by the fact that the Germans advancing along the northern bank of the reservoir, in the Kalinin Front zone, had captured the railway bridge and cut the Moscow-Leningrad Highway.

Enemy troops began to build up rapidly in the Klin sector. The threat from the north steadily mounted. The pressure on our left flank, where all our reserves had already been committed to action, continued relentlessly.

I had to consider what steps could be taken to improve the Army's position and halt the enemy's advance. By then there was fighting in the centre and on the left flank 10 or 12 kilometres west of the Istra Reservoir. The reservoir, the River Istra and the surrounding terrain provided excellent opportunities for organising a powerful defence with small forces. It would then be possible to withdraw some troops to the second echelon, creating a defence in depth, and transfer a sizeable force to back up the Klin sector.

After carefully weighing all the pros and cons and discussing the plan with my assistants, I reported it to the Front Commander, requesting permission to pull back to the Istra line without waiting for the enemy to throw the defenders back and cross the river and reservoir hot on their heels.

Our troops had suffered heavily in men and materiel, to say nothing of the terrible strain of days of fighting and sleepless nights that affected both officers and men, so that even we at the top were literally falling off our feet and were grateful for the opportunity to take a nap driving in a staff car from one sector to another.

The Front Commander rejected my request and ordered us to fight back to the end, without retreating a step.

In war there may be situations when a decision to stand to the last man is the only possible one. It is undoubtedly justified when it achieves an important goal, such as saving the majority from imminent death, or creating conditions for rectifying a difficult situation and ensuring overall success, in the name of which men are called upon to carry out their soldier's duty to the very end, at the cost of their lives. In the present case, however, there were no troops behind the 16th Army, and if the defending units were smashed the road to Moscow would be open—which was

just what the enemy had all the time been striving to achieve.

I considered the question of drawing back to the Istra line so important that my duty as a commander and a Communist did not allow me to accept the Front Commander's decision without a murmur. Accordingly, I appealed directly to the Chief of the General Staff, Marshal B. M. Shaposhnikov, outlining my plan and reasoning in support of it in a telegram. Several hours later the reply came, in which Shaposhnikov declared our suggestion to be correct and endorsed it in his capacity of Chief of the General Staff.

Knowing Marshal Shaposhnikov from my service before the war, I was quite sure that his reply had been cleared with the Supreme Commander, or at the very least he had been informed of it.

We lost no time drawing up the orders directing our main forces to withdraw during the night to the Istra Reservoir line. The old positions were to be temporarily manned by reinforced detachments which were to retreat only under enemy pressure. The order was dispatched to all units by liaison officers.

Our spirits rose. Now, we reflected, the Germans would break their teeth on the Istra line. Their main force, armour, would come up against an insurmountable obstacle and the motorised units would be unable to exploit their mobility.

Our joy, however, was short-lived. Even before all the troops had received the order to withdraw I received a curt, angry telegram from Zhukov. Here it is verbatim:

"I am the Front Commander! I countermand the order to withdraw to the Istra Reservoir and order you to defend the lines you occupy without retreating one step. General of the Army Zhukov."

There was nothing I could do: an order is an order, and, being soldiers, we obeyed it. The results were unfortunate. As we had anticipated, the enemy continued to push back our units on the left flank, forcing them to retreat eastwards, crossed the Istra and captured bridgeheads on its eastern bank. At the same time, south of the Volga Reservoir he penetrated the defences of the 30th Army and poured armour and motorised units into the gap. Now his troops appeared on the flank and in the rear of the 126th Infantry Division, which was defending our right flank; it was greatly weakened in the earlier fighting and could hardly hold back

the attacking enemy. At the same time the enemy struck from the neighbourhood of Teryaeva Sloboda, their armour and infantry advancing on Solnechnogorsk and skirting the Istra Reservoir from the north.

An extremely grave situation developed in the Klin and Solnechnogorsk sectors, where the nazi command achieved a great superiority of forces by committing to battle six divisions: three panzer (6th, 7th and 2nd), two infantry (106th and 35th), and one motorised (14th). I sent my deputy, Major-General F. D. Zakharov, to organise resistance at Klin. By then General D. D Lelyushenko's 30th Army, our neighbour on the right, had been subordinated to the Western Front. General Zakharov's assignment was to assume command over the troops at the boundary between the two armies. However, the forces there were insufficient to halt the advancing enemy, comprising, as they did, the undermanned 126th Infantry Division, the very weak 17th Cavalry Division and 25th Tank Brigade with a total of 12 tanks, only four of them T-34s. The 30th Army units that took the German's main blow—the 107th Infantry (a bare 300 men strong) and 58th Tank Division (with no tanks at all)—were thrown back and scattered. Enemy panzers began to advance swiftly on Klin, skirting our Army from the north. Against these odds, General Zakharov gathered all the available forces and organised the defence of Klin.

Shortly afterwards, on orders of the Front Commander, I too went to Klin together with A. A. Lobachov. Viewing the situation on the spot, the only conclusion we could draw was that the town could not be held. What had to be considered was how to check the enemy's imminent advance towards Dmitrov and Yakhroma. I ordered Malinin to dispatch General Kazakov with artillery to Klin to combat the panzers, but in the morning of November 23, I was told that the enemy had occupied Solnechnogorsk. In this situation the Military Council Member and I could not remain on the flank any longer; we had to be at the centre of the Army for the sake of better troop control and to prevent the front from being penetrated.

From the local post office I managed to get a phone call through to General Vasily Sokolovsky, Chief of Staff of the Western Front. I reported the grave situation, but our conversation was interrupted by a shell that hit the post office building and damaged the wires. Meanwhile enemy tanks enveloping Klin from the north broke into the town.

Before leaving Klin, I told General Zakharov that he had full freedom of command over all troops in the Klin sector and eastwards, stressing that his main task was to resist the enemy advance towards Dmitrov and Yakhroma with every means at his disposal and thereby win the time needed for fresh forces to come up. I warned him that the artillery I had requested would hardly arrive now, with the exception of a 16-gun antitank regiment which had already distinguished itself at Klin by knocking out 33 enemy tanks.

With this I bid farewell to General Zakharov and V. A. Gaidukov, Commander of the 17th Cavalry Division, whose men were fighting gallantly in the battle for Klin, and left the burning town, accompanied by Lobachov.

There was only one road left, through Novoshchapovo. Several times our cars were shelled by enemy tanks that had penetrated northeast of Klin. As we were crossing the River Sestra, now frozen over, the Germans scored a direct hit on our escort car with the quad machine-gun mount.

As Solnechnogorsk was already in enemy hands, we had to make a detour through Rogachovo. There were several of us in two cars, we were armed with submachine-guns and hand grenades. I had, besides my revolver, an excellent submachine-gun presented to me by Tula workers and two hand grenades. We could stand up for ourselves if the worst came to worst, but there was no sense in falling into a German ambush in these woods, and we travelled at night, with every possible precaution.

We reached the Leningrad Highway at Durykino. There were no army units, only crowds of refugees from Solnechnogorsk, who said the town had been taken by the Germans many hours ago. The situation appeared to be gloomy indeed.

We arrived at our headquarters late at night. V. I. Kazakov, just back from Solnechnogorsk, confirmed that the Germans were there. According to him, the Front Commander had entrusted the defence of the town to General V. A. Revyakin (the Commandant of Moscow), who had apparently bungled his assignment at some point. Solnechnogorsk had been taken by a small force of enemy submachine-gunners, armour arriving only towards evening.

The overall situation was as follows. On the right flank, in the Klin sector, large German armour and motorised forces were still bypassing the 16th Army on the north. In

spite of the heroic resistance of General Zakharov's force, towards the end of 23rd November the enemy occupied Klin, but his attempts at a quick dash eastward encountered further stubborn, well-organised resistance from Zakharov's sadly undermanned units. In the Solnechnogorsk sector, the enemy had pushed back the cadet regiment, skirted the Istra Reservoir and, after taking Solnechnogorsk, was advancing south, towards Moscow. As I mentioned before, our troops had been forced to retreat to the Istra line, but the enemy, despite all his efforts, was unable to break through our defences at any point. Everywhere infantry, artillery, armour, mortar crews, cavalrymen, engineers fought gallantly, beating back the enemy from organised defences and inflicting great losses on the Germans in counterattacks.

The most sensitive spot at the moment was Solnechnogorsk, where the danger of a general enemy assault on Moscow was developing. We had no reserves and could concentrate more troops only at the cost of weakening the defences on other sectors. The 289th and 296th Antitank Regiments and 138th Artillery Regiment had been removed from their positions on the Istra and were being transferred to the Klin sector; Kazakov, however, stopped them in the area of Solnechnogorsk and now they were deployed on their positions. General Dovator's cavalry group, reinforced with two armour battalions and two infantry battalions from the Panfilov division, was also assigned to this sector.

We decided to set up a temporary Army Command Post at Peshki village, near Solnechnogorsk, and transfer the main CP to Lyalovo.

We reached Peshki in the evening on November 24. A T-34 tank was parked outside one house. Inside we found a group of officers, among them Generals I. P. Kamera and A. V. Kurkin. Everyone was talking at once about the situation, and the noise was impossible. Eventually it turned out that the generals had been sent here from Front Headquarters to check up on the situation.

General Kamera shook my hand, saying, "Well, we've done enough talking. The man responsible for the defence of this sector has arrived, so let's not get in his way."

This was sound advice. The headquarters team departed, leaving behind the commander of an armoured unit, whose name I cannot recall, with orders from Front Headquarters to cover the Solnechnogorsk sector.

It was time to appraise the situation. From reports of staff officers I gathered that, north of Peshki, there were scattered forces of General Revyakin's group and several tanks near the main road. The 16th Army units had not yet occupied the sectors assigned to them on my orders, and headquarters was in touch with them by radio.

I was about to order the tank commander to find out who was covering the road, when the Germans began shelling the village. One shell pierced the wall of the house we were in, but failed to explode.

I asked the tank commander where his tanks were and what they were doing. His reply surprised me indeed: he had left two tanks with the infantry dug in north of the village and sent the rest to Durykino to refuel.

"Are you quite sure those two tanks didn't go to refuel too?" I asked.

The officer flushed. I had to tell him that at the front the practice was to bring the fuel to the tanks from the rear, not the other way around, and told him to get the tanks back to Peshki at once. No sooner had he left than a liaison officer rushed in to say that German tanks had entered the village along the highway, with submachine-gunners advancing on either side and firing at the houses. This was the toughest spot we had been in yet and it called for some quick thinking. My first thought was, "Where are the troops holding the routes from Solnechnogorsk?" My second, "Where are our cars?" (We had left them on the southern edge of the village.)

We went out of the house and looked about. Shells were exploding in the village on all sides. Some of them whined overhead and plopped to the ground or smashed through walls or fences without exploding: evidently solid steel shells fired by German panzers.

The night was lit up by mortar-shell bursts and varicoloured tracks left by tracer bullets. It was an impressive sight but the realisation of danger blotted out all other thoughts. The tank was still parked outside the house. Its commander invited me to get in. I ordered him to drive off at once, find his unit, defend the highway and prevent the enemy from advancing beyond the railway that crossed the Leningrad Highway six or eight kilometres south of Peshki.

Meanwhile we—there must have been a dozen of us—scattered as widely as we could while keeping within sight

of each other and made our way towards the gully at the end of the village. The T-34 tank clattered by at top speed not far away, drawing powerful enemy fire, and disappeared from sight. Cautiously we approached the highway and located the cars.

Realising that it was no use wandering about under the enemy's nose, I drove off at once to Army Headquarters so as to control the troops concentrating in the Solnechnogorsk sector from there.

At Lyalovo, Malinin reported that Zhukov and Sokolovsky had inquired several times whether the Army had assumed the offensive at Solnechnogorsk. The point was that the Front Command had altered the assignment I had given the troops taken from the Istra positions, and instead of assuming the defensive near Solnechnogorsk they were to attack and knock the enemy out of the town. The assignment reached us when the units were already on the march and, of course, there was no time to organise the attack.

Unfortunately, it occasionally happened that the higher echelons issued orders and directives without due account of the time factor or the state of the troops designated to carry them out. In the changing fortunes of the war these orders could not keep up with events and by the time they reached the troops they were quite out of keeping with the situation. As a result the orders frequently reflected no more than wishful thinking not reinforced by practical possibilities. All this caused the subordinate commanders a lot of trouble, and a lot of anxiety too!

The attack at Solnechnogorsk was launched hastily. Three cavalry divisions attempted to envelop the enemy holding the town from the southwest and southeast. At first they were successful. With characteristic energy and speed General Pliyev routed the German 240th Regiment at Sverchkovo, Selishchevo and Martynovo. The other troops also pushed forward, but were then halted and thrown back to their positions. The enemy brought up sufficient forces to repell all the attacks of Dovator's group, and it was certainly no fault of his that he was unable to carry out his assignment. The cavalrymen, supported by a few tanks and antitank artillery, acted with the greatest gallantry attacking the enemy in dismounted battle formation. Many villages changed hands several times, but the forces were unequal, and by nightfall the unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the enemy had to be abandoned.

The cavalry suffered great losses from German air strikes, and by the morning of November 25, General Dovator's group went over to the defence. The overall result of the operation can be summed up as follows: our troops had been unable to force the enemy back from Solnechnogorsk, but neither had he been able to exploit his success in the direction of Moscow.

The 16th Army troops strained to the utmost to prevent the enemy from advancing one more step. The fighting raged ceaselessly, with the Germans attacking at night, something they had hardly ever done before. With maniacal ferocity they struck forward, stepping figuratively speaking, over their own corpses in the process.

All of us, from private to army commander, felt that these were decisive days and we had to hold out at all costs. No one needed any prodding. The Army as a whole, tried and tested in the crucible of battle, fully realised the measure of its responsibility.

The whole Western Front was going through grave and trying times, and I could fully understand the nervousness and impetuosity of some of our immediate superiors. Still, an essential quality of every military leader is self-control, calmness and respect for his subordinates, especially in times of war. Believe an old soldier: there is nothing a man prizes more in combat that the realisation that he is trusted, believed, relied upon. Unfortunately, the Commander of our Western Front did not always take this into account.

I am bound with Georgi Zhukov by many years of friendship. Fate brought us together repeatedly, only to part us again for long periods. We first met back in 1924, at the Higher Cavalry School in Leningrad. We arrived there as cavalry regiment commanders, I from the Transbaikal area, he from the Ukraine. Among the students were Bagramyan, Sinyakov, Eremenko and others. We were young and energetic and soon came together naturally in a close-knit team. We plunged into our studies with a will, especially Zhukov, who gave himself up completely to mastering the subtleties of military science. Whenever we dropped into his room he would be crawling about over a map spread on the floor. Even then there was nothing higher for him than duty.

In the very beginning of the thirties our ways met at Minsk, where I was in command of a cavalry division in Timoshenko's corps and Zhukov was a regimental command-

er in the division. On the eve of the war, we met in a different capacity: General of the Army Zhukov was commander of a military district while I was a major-general and in command of, first a cavalry, then a mechanised, corps. Zhukov was advancing rapidly. He had everything in abundance—talent, energy and confidence in himself.

And now here we were together again in the crucial battles on the approaches to Moscow. Only this time there was occasional friction between us. Why? I have always regarded Georgi Zhukov as a man of strong will and resolution, richly endowed with all the qualities that go into the making of a great military leader. The crux of the matter, apparently, was that we had different views on the extent to which a commander should assert his will and the manner in which he should do it. In war much depends on this.

I remember a conversation between Zhukov and Stalin which I witnessed (this was later on, in the winter). Stalin had instructed Zhukov to carry out some minor operation, in the area of the railway station Mga, if I remember correctly, in order to help the Leningraders a bit. Zhukov insisted that a large-scale operation was necessary if the objective was to be achieved.

"That is all very well, Comrade Zhukov," Stalin replied, "but we lack the means, and this must be taken into account."

Zhukov stuck to his guns. "Nothing will come out of it otherwise," he declared. "Wishful thinking is not enough."

Stalin did not conceal his irritation, but Zhukov stood his ground. Finally Stalin said, "Think it over, Comrade Zhukov. You may go for the time being."

I admired Zhukov's straightforwardness, but when we left the room I remarked that I didn't think he should have spoken so sharply with the Supreme Commander.

"It's nothing to what goes on here sometimes," Zhukov replied.

What he said then was right. Wishful thinking is never enough for success in battle. However, during the Battle of Moscow Zhukov himself often forgot this.

Insistence on the highest standards is an important and essential trait for any military leader. But it is equally essential for him to combine an iron will with tactfulness, respect for his subordinates, and the ability to rely on their intelligence and initiative. In those grim days our Front

Commander did not always follow this rule. He could also be unfair in a fit of temper.

Several days after one stormy conversation with Zhukov I returned to the CP from the Istra positions where a pitched battle was going on. The duty officer reported that Stalin was asking for the Army Commander on the telephone. The enemy had just forced our troops back—not very much, but still.... In short, as I went to the telephone under the impression of my last talk with Zhukov I imagined the thunderbolts that would now be heaped upon my head. Anyhow, I was prepared for the worst.

I picked up the receiver and heard the Supreme Commander's calm, even voice. He inquired about the situation on the Istra sector. I reported and immediately began enumerating the countermeasures I intended to take. However, Stalin interrupted me mildly and said there was no need to go into detail, thereby stressing the confidence in me as Army Commander. In conclusion he asked if we were hard pressed. To my affirmative reply he said that he quite understood, adding, "Please hold out a little longer; we shall help you."

Need I say that such concern displayed by the Supreme Commander was invaluable. The kind, fatherly intonations were encouraging and raised one's self-confidence. Add to this that by morning the promised help arrived in the shape of a rocket-launcher regiment and two antitank regiments, four antitank companies and three tank battalions, plus more than 2,000 volunteers sent by Stalin for good measure. In our straits even small reinforcements meant much.

The situation in the Klin sector continued to deteriorate. General Zakharov assumed control over all the units in the area, his force including the 17th Cavalry and 126th and 133rd Infantry Divisions, the Kremlin cadet regiment, and the 25th Tank Brigade (or rather all that was left of these units). The enemy, as we established in the course of the fighting, had committed units of the 6th and 7th Panzer Divisions and the 23rd and 106th Infantry Divisions on the Dmitrov-Yakhroma sector, and on December 1, units of the 1st Panzer also appeared here.

Obviously, Zakharov's force was incapable of halting this mass of nazi troops thrusting towards Dmitrov and Yakhroma, but it brilliantly carried out its task of slowing down the enemy's advance as much as possible. Resisting fiercely as they fell back from line to line, Zakharov's troops forced

the enemy to stop, deploy and fight his way on again. In ten days of heavy fighting, during which Zakharov's men often had to fight their way out of encirclement, dealing the enemy telling blows both from the front and the rear, they were, like all the defenders of Moscow, inspired by the one desire to destroy as many nazis they could by all possible means and sap the enemy's strength until the decisive moment.

The Kremlin cadets and Colonel N. N. Multan's regiment of the 133rd Infantry Division especially distinguished themselves in the fighting on the Dmitrov-Yakhroma sector.

The German Command was throwing its last reserves into action, as was apparent from the appearance of troops of the 1st Panzer Division from the 3rd Panzer Group on the 16th Army's right flank. But though the enemy continued to exploit his superiority and advance, while we threw all we had into the battle, it was apparent that the turning point was not far off.

Before we had time to settle down at Lyalovo, German tanks appeared on the northeastern edge of the village. Everyone rushed into the fight, including officers from the Army Headquarters. The day was saved by a battalion of 85-mm antitank guns, which scored several direct hits, and the attack petered out.

Shells whined overhead and blasts shook the ground as we made our way out of Lyalovo and headed for Kryukovo. I was delighted to see that in these difficult conditions my Chief of Staff was as methodical and confident as ever. The machinery of command was flexible and sensitive as never before.

After the nazis occupied Lyalovo, the Front Commander finally conceded to our persistent requests and reinforced the Army with a tank brigade, small numerically but headed by an experienced commander, F. Remizov, and with an infantry regiment, a separate cavalry regiment, an artillery and an antitank regiments. By now the Front Command had reached the bottom of its reserves and all it could do was to take troops from one sector to reinforce another where the situation happened to be worse.

The Army's defences were spread so thin that they threatened to burst. It took feats of troop juggling to prevent this from happening.

We received the reinforcements in due course and, on Zhukov's orders, attempted a counterattack against the

enemy group holding the Lyalovo area. We achieved only limited success, but halted the enemy's advance for the time being.

The 16th Army, bled white and still bleeding from countless wounds, clung desperately to every inch of ground, resisting the enemy with dogged tenacity, retreating a step and coming back again and again, gradually sapping the enemy's strength. We could not halt him completely, but neither did he succeed in breaching our defences.

Both sides were strained to the utmost. According to intelligence data, all of von Bock's reserves had been committed to action at Moscow. It was our duty to hold out at all costs.

General Zhukov did his best to bolster our weakened forces, but without committing any of the strategic reserves to action. They were being brought up by GHQ to the most threatened sectors around Moscow and were to be withheld until the decisive moment.

One night at the end of November, I was called to the telephone at my CP in Kryukovo. It was Stalin, who asked if I was aware that enemy units had appeared in the neighbourhood of Krasnaya Polyana, and what steps I was taking to prevent them from occupying the place. He stressed the point that from Krasnaya Polyana the nazis could reach the capital with long-range artillery. I reported that advance German units had penetrated our line north of Krasnaya Polyana and that forces were being brought up from other sectors to repell them. Stalin told me that the sector would be reinforced with troops of the Moscow Defence Zone.

Shortly afterwards, General Sokolovsky, the Front Chief of Staff, informed me that a tank brigade, artillery regiment and four rocket-launcher battalions were being detailed from the Front reserve to support our counterattacks. To this we added two infantry battalions, an artillery regiment and two GHQ artillery regiments which we had earmarked previously for the fighting at Solnechnogorsk.

The task of assembling and organising the troops was assigned to General Kazakov and Lieutenant-Colonel Oryol. They left at once for Chornaya Gryaz, where an auxiliary command post was located. Shortly afterwards I followed them there.

We had to act quickly. The troops arriving at Chornaya Gryaz were given their tasks and at once rushed to their positions.

The attack began at dawn. Our troops, supported by heavy artillery and rocket fire, struck before the enemy could consolidate the captured ground. The nazis resisted fiercely, launching counter-attacks and air strikes, but by the end of the day we had knocked them out of Krasnaya Polyana and threw them back four to six kilometres to the north. They were thus denied the possibility of shelling Moscow with heavy guns.

Now the situation at Solnechnogorsk deteriorated, as the 7th and 8th Guards Divisions, a regiment of the 354th Division, Dovator's cavalry corps and the 20th Cavalry Division were forced back to the line Klushino, Matushkino, Kryukovo, Barantsevo. We threw all we had into the battle, but even so the Army CP in Kryukovo was in trouble. With mortar and gun shells exploding in the streets, our troops resisting enemy panzers on the northern outskirts and enemy planes strafing the defenders, we had to move it out of range of the enemy.

Our aircraft also took part in this battle, and for the first time since the beginning of the war I saw our planes in action in relatively large numbers, though the enemy still continued to enjoy numerical superiority. Still, the appearance of Soviet fighter, attack and bomber planes overhead was a great inspiration to the troops.

Fierce fighting continued ceaselessly along the whole front of the 16th and neighbouring 30th and 5th Armies on our right and left. The enemy forced units of the 30th Army back to the eastern bank of the Moskva-Volga Canal, which he succeeded in crossing with small forces south of Dmitrov. Units on the right flank of the 5th Army were also pushed back.

In those decisive days the 16th Army took the shock of the enemy's main effort. It was here, on the flanking sector closest to Moscow, that the nazis strained to breach the front, committing all the panzer and motorised divisions they had to achieve their objective.

By one last effort they succeeded in pushing back our Army's left flank to the line Barantsevo, Khovanskoye, Petrovskoye, Lenino. And there they ground to a halt, exhausted.

On this sector two divisions, the 18th Moscow Infantry and 78th, opposed the nazis, both earning the title of Guards Divisions: the former *opolcheniye* division under

P. N. Chernyshov became the 11th Guards, the 78th under A. P. Beloborodov became the 9th Guards.

Fierce fighting continued, especially for Kryukovo, which changed hands several times, but the enemy was unable to advance any further.

Meanwhile, north of Moscow the 20th Army and the 1st Strike Army of the GHQ Reserve were concentrating behind the boundary of the 30th and 16th Armies, and reserves were also coming up to the south of the capital.

In the very last days several large units were brought in to bolster the defence on especially threatened sectors, notably at Yakhroma, but GHQ's main reserves were withheld for the decisive blow. It was this that ultimately decided the outcome of the Battle of Moscow.

FORWARD!

The German strike forces had reached the bottom of their reserves without breaching our defences at Moscow, and the enemy command was now compelled to think about their own defences. We had all sensed this. In the concluding days of his offensive the enemy had concentrated mainly on gaining time to consolidate captured ground and make firm at all costs the positions captured near Moscow.

This plan had to be thwarted and the Soviet Supreme Command decided to counterattack before the enemy could organise his defences. In preparation for this GHQ reinforced the defending troops, assigning a portion of its reserves to the Western Front. Our Army received three infantry brigades, though none of them in actual strength numbered more than a reinforced regiment. Still, they were something and we were glad to have them.

The Soviet counteroffensive was mounted without so much as a pause for regrouping. In fact, the fighting at Krasnaya Polyana, Lyalovo and Kryukovo continued unabated as the 8th Guards Division, reinforced with a tank battalion, the 17th Infantry Brigade, and the 44th Cavalry Division, with two artillery regiments and two rocket-launcher battalions, went over to the offensive.

By December 8, after almost three days of fighting, that frequently developed into hand-to-hand combat, and an enveloping movement from the southwest, the enemy's resistance was broken and he fled westward from Kryukovo and neighbouring villages, abandoning tanks, trucks, cars, weapons, munitions and other materiel. At Kamenka we captured two 300-mm guns brought up to shell Moscow.

Now the Army's main forces assumed the offensive on the Istra sector. The enemy had not had time to organise his defences, and our troops, after overcoming his stubborn resistance, began to pursue him. The deep snow and severe frosts prevented us from engaging in enveloping movements

away from the roads to cut off the enemy's routes of withdrawal, and the German generals, instead of blaming the Russian winter for their defeat, should perhaps be grateful for the harsh weather that enabled them to retreat with less losses than they would otherwise have suffered.

The Germans did all they could to check our advance, mining roads extensively and planting all kinds of booby-traps in the most unlikely places. Our Army HQ moved forward hot in the wake of the advancing troops. We often made detours to overtake the columns travelling on the road, and this meant passing through country not yet demined by the engineers. It was not at all pleasant to walk gingerly through deep snow half expecting your next step to leave you without legs. However, if we hoped to retain our momentum, we could not wait for the roads to be made completely safe. We were spurred on by the knowledge that the enemy must not be allowed to disengage from the pursuing troops and organise his defences.

The retreating nazis set villages on fire and mined the houses they had not burned down. Lobachov, Malinin, several other comrades and I took up quarters in one of these houses, after demining, of course. We unfolded our maps and were about to get down to our work of taking stock of the situation when some correspondents burst in, followed by several newsreel men with their cameras. They filled the room, the only habitable one in the house, and it was quite impossible to work. Something had to be done. The defused mines suggested an idea. A simple pulley clock hung on the wall. Its proper weights had been replaced by cloth bags filled with some heavy substance. Looking up, I remarked that the nazis planted all kinds of booby-traps—a fact that the newsmen knew only too well—and warned them to be careful not to touch the clock. My words acted like magic, and in a few moments we were able to go on with our work without having actually turned the unwanted visitors out.

By now the two reserve armies allocated to the Western Front by GHQ had filled the gap between the 16th and 30th Armies, and our zone of attack was narrowed substantially. This enabled us to set up a second echelon to give power to our punches wherever the enemy put up a stiffer resistance.

The offensive developed successfully. The 20th Army, our neighbour on the right, advanced rather slowly in the

direction of Solnechnogorsk. On the left, the 5th Army also began to advance westward, its task being to pin down as many enemy forces as possible and thus prevent him from reinforcing the zone of the Front's main effort. Front HQ informed us of the successful advance of the 30th and the 1st Strike Armies, and that General Headquarters had also ordered the left flank of the Kalinin Front to assume the offensive.

My principal concern now was the powerful defensive line which the Istra presented on the route of our advance. To prevent the enemy from consolidating there I ordered the units to push forward at top speed and force the river on the heels of the retreating Germans. I also had a mobile force readied to envelop the Istra Reservoir on the north and south in case the enemy blew up the locks.

On the approaches to the Istra sector the enemy's resistance began to stiffen and I felt we would be unable to effect a swift crossing. Accordingly, I concentrated on strengthening the enveloping forces: F. Remizov's on the right, and M. Y. Katukov's on the left.

The nazis blew up the reservoir dam and a torrential flood swelled the river, creating great difficulties for our troops. This was where the mobile groups came in useful. Striking from the north and south, Remizov and Katukov forced the enemy back, thus helping the infantry divisions perform their tasks. The outcome of the battle was decided—in our favour.

I witnessed A. P. Beloborodov's Siberian troops force the icy torrent in bitter frost and under enemy fire. All the so-called available means—logs, fences, gates, straw rafts, inflatable boats—everything capable of floating on water—were used for the crossing.

The operation was excellently supported by our gunners and mortarmen. They demonstrated their mettle both in the defensive and the offensive, and I feel it my duty to stress this. Long before the war, our Party and its Central Committee foresaw the role and importance of artillery on the battlefield and took steps to provide the nation's Armed Forces with the most up-to-date ordnance. Highly qualified commanders were trained at artillery officer schools, advanced training and retraining courses and the Artillery Academy. It is to the credit of the higher command of the Soviet Artillery that its quality and the standards of training of its officers and men far surpassed those of the

artillery of the armies of all capitalist countries. Our artillery proved this all through the Great Patriotic War.

From the outset, artillery was the principal means of opposition to the enemy's tanks, which overwhelmed us in numbers and mobility. The artillery won unfading glory in the Battle of Moscow, and this holds in full measure for the artillery units organic to the 16th Army and those that co-operated with it. Our gunners trusted implicitly in the power of their weapons, and this kept the crews going at their guns despite the enemy's numerical superiority and the frequent danger of being crushed by tanks rolling en masse towards their positions. When circumstances demanded it, crews continued to deliver fire to the last shell and the last gun, successfully repulsing the enemy's furious attacks.

After overcoming the Istra line the 16th Army continued to advance against enemy opposition, giving him no time to stop and organise a defence. In his efforts to disengage from the pursuing units and save men from annihilation the enemy abandoned everything that hampered his flight. More and more frequently we came upon long stretches of highway cluttered with abandoned weapons and materiel: hundreds of tanks and self-propelled guns, truck-tractors, pieces of ordnance of all calibres, thousands of machines of all types, crates of ammunition. And it was all mined, as were the roadsides on both sides of these scrap-heaps.

Naturally, the speed of advance slowed down. It should be recalled that we had no special machines then for making cross-country roads through deep snow. With their rather primitive implements the engineers and infantry were barely able to clear the available roads, not to speak of building new ones. To accelerate the advance we made extensive use of units of skiers, but they were obviously too weak to delay the retreating enemy long enough to allow our main forces to come up and destroy him.

The further our units advanced from Moscow the stiffer the enemy's resistance became. From captured documents and POW statements we learned that Hitler had ordered his troops to take up strategic defensive positions. Their task was thus to halt the Soviet advance at all costs and, exploiting advantageous lines and the harsh winter conditions, inflict as heavy losses as possible in preparation for the summer campaign of 1942.

Especially stubborn fighting developed in the Volokolamsk sector, where the Battle of Moscow had begun in October

1941. Then the nazi command had concentrated vast forces and were anticipating the triumphant entry of their hordes into the Soviet capital. Now they were compelled to flee ignominously westward, thinking only of how to halt our advance.

But it was hard going for us too. The 16th Army had suffered great casualties in the course of the protracted defensive fighting and subsequent counteroffensive. The divisions numbered no more than 1,200 to 1,500 men each, artillery and mortarmen, engineers, signallers and staffs included. The number of infantry effectives was small indeed, and our command and political personnel had also suffered serious losses in the fighting. The situation in the neighbouring armies was no better.

Even before we approached the line of the rivers Lama and Ruza, the Western Front Command had increasingly resorted to the creation of groupings on one sector or another, with a portion of one army's forces being assigned to another army, in an attempt to build up forces to sustain the momentum of the offensive. Such improvisation yielded a measure of success, though of a local nature. But by the time we reached the Volokolamsk line it became apparent that the enemy had recovered from the body blows he had received and his defence was growing in organisation and strength.

Our counteroffensive ended at the beginning of January. The enemy's northern and southern strike forces had been routed and thrown back 100 to 300 kilometres. The immediate threat to the capital had been removed.

We realised that the victory in this stupendous battle that had raged over so vast an area and involved the troops of almost three full army groups marked a turning point in the whole war.

SUKHINICHI

In the middle of January, on orders from General Headquarters a new offensive was launched on various sectors of the Soviet-German front. The Western Front, too, resumed the offensive, and we took part, though now on the left wing instead of the right. General F. I. Golikov's 10th Army was in trouble. The Germans had not only halted it but, bringing in reinforcements on the Zhizdra sector, had recaptured Sukhinichi, a major railway junction, and cut the supply routes of the Front's left wing, which had pushed forward into a salient in the area of Kirov.

The 16th Army Command and headquarters received orders to move to the Sukhinichi area, assume command over the units active there and restore the situation.

Handing over our sector and troops to our neighbours, we proceeded in marching formation to our new fighting zone. M. S. Malinin led the headquarters column to Kaluga, while Lobachov and I dropped in at the Front Command Post.

We were received there by the Chief of Staff, Vasily Sokolovsky, and then by the Front Commander himself. Zhukov briefed us on the situation that had developed on the left wing and warned us that the only forces we could count upon were those we would take over on the spot.

"I hope," he said, "that even with these forces you will succeed in overcoming the enemy and will soon report the liberation of Sukhinichi."

I took these words as an indication of Zhukov's high opinion of us.

The 16th Army took over from Golikov the 322nd, 323rd, 324th and 328th Infantry Divisions and a tank brigade—together with a frontage of 60 kilometres. The only Battle of Moscow unit that remained with us was the 11th Guards Division (which, the reader will recall, was the Moscow *Opolcheniye* Division we had met after getting out of Vyazma four months earlier and with

which we had occupied the positions at Volokolamsk; now they were a Guards unit tempered in the Battle of Moscow).

Our neighbour on the left was the 61st Army, now transferred to the Western Front; its commander was General M. M. Popov. On the right the command of the 10th Army was assumed by General V. S. Popov. We were thus between two Popovs: a good omen, they would have said in the old days.

Our route lay through Moscow. Evening was falling when we approached the city. The barricades on the outskirts had already been dismantled, but the antitank defences were still there as a reminder of the heroism of their builders. The Muscovites had loyally fulfilled their duty to the country and made a great effort for the defence of the capital. We soldiers had felt their contribution while fighting for the city. Now the factories, mills, workshops were working at top gear in the name of final victory over the enemy.

The city was blacked out, cars, most of them military, heading for the front, drove with dimmed and dipped headlights. The blackout was very strict, but the atmosphere was calm and orderly. The war and recent proximity of the enemy had naturally left an imprint on the city, but one felt that the tenor of life in the homes behind those blacked-out windows had changed. We all felt proud in the realisation that we too had taken part in the great struggle.

We could not resist the opportunity to spend the night in Moscow. Lobachov suggested it and I readily accepted. The city militia force was headed by V. N. Romanchenko, a service comrade of mine from the Transbaikal area, and we went to see him. From Romanchenko we learned of the several rather alarming days Moscow had experienced in October. Some people—not many—had given way to panic and tried to flee the city. With the help of the working people of the capital, the City Party Committee and municipal authorities had taken prompt measures to deal with the situation. Incidentally, one of the beneficiaries of these measures was our 16th Army, which had received several cars confiscated from the panic-mongers by the militia. In fact, we were driving in these cars right now, on our way to Sukhinichi.

In the warm and cosy apartment of my friend's we fell into a state of bliss. After endless sleeping in cars, trenches, dugouts, such sudden luxury: a hot bath and beds with crisp,

clean sheets. It was light, warm and quiet, with no sound of shots or exploding bombs and shells.

At dawn we ate a hearty breakfast and set off for Kaluga, where the whole staff was due to arrive that day. From there it was not far to our destination, and I decided to stop over in the town to draw up the plans of our future operations.

Kaluga had not suffered greatly in the fighting, but signs of the Germans' hasty retreat were everywhere. The streets were littered with abandoned equipment. However, during their stay in the city the nazis had stripped its inhabitants of everything they possessed. There was no food, all warm things and footwear had been confiscated. The townspeople were in a terrible plight and we had to take urgent measures to save many from starvation.

We spent the night discussing how to carry out our assignment and came to the conclusion that the best thing would be to delude the enemy into thinking that the whole 16th Army was deploying at Sukhinichi. The Germans knew its worth from the recent fighting.

We instructed the forward headquarters, already installed in Meshchovsk, to be reasonably outspoken over the radio, mentioning the 16th Army frequently, the numbers of divisions (none of which were with us, of course), the Army Commander's name, etc. In short, to put on a good show on the air.

"Attack with unfurled banners, eh?" Malinin said, laughing.

"That's it! With fifes and drums!"

On January 24, we arrived in Meshchovsk. The staff got down to the business in hand. General Kazakov drove to the artillery regiments being handed over to us to study their possibilities on the spot. With the Member of the Military Council I drove to the 10th Army CP, located in the tiny snowbound village of Mekhovaya. There was no reaching it by car, so we had to go by horse sleigh. Perhaps this was not the best site for an Army CP: one could hardly find one's way to it in daytime, to say nothing of night. Incidentally, for the army in general movement by day was forbidden because of the German aircraft hunting along the roads.

The information concerning the divisions being transferred to us was none too encouraging. We went on to the troops to see for ourselves. On the way we were attacked

twice by lone German planes. They were brazen indeed, buzzing so low over our heads that we opened fire with submachine-guns. The encounter ended without mishap for us or, of course, for them. However, I decided that urgent measures had to be taken to put an end to the enemy's impunity in the air.

For the third time in this war our headquarters was assuming control over new units. As before, there was no time for an orderly take-over, but we did not doubt that under Mikhail Malinin's able leadership everything would be carried out according to schedule and in perfect order. While we busied ourselves with the troops, the staff officers worked calmly and efficiently to establish communications, organise reconnaissance of the enemy and the terrain and collect all data pertinent to our immediate task of recapturing Sukhinichi.

Very soon we gained a fairly accurate idea of the enemy's intentions. His attack against the 10th Army had pursued a limited objective: to capture Sukhinichi and several villages and push our troops farther north from the main Orel-Bryansk road, thereby improving his position and consolidating on the captured lines for the winter.

In the course of its advance to the west, the 10th Army had spread its troops into the thinnest possible line. Poorly controlled, they had had no time to organise their defence and were easily thrown back by the Germans, especially as the nazi command had committed to action at Zhizdra fresh troops transferred from France. One of these infantry divisions, under the command of General von Gilsa, had occupied Sukhinichi and was firmly entrenched there, showing no intention of leaving.

At Front HQ we had been told that units of the 10th Army had surrounded the enemy in Sukhinichi, and at Mekhovaya I was assured that Sukhinichi was invested by General N. I. Kiryukhin's 324th Division. However, the division commander, an energetic and level-headed man, said frankly when we met:

"Oh yes, we've surrounded them—with flags. And now we're afraid of being surrounded ourselves."

Inspecting the troops incorporated in the 16th Army, I saw that they were short of practically everything. The divisions had advanced more than 300 kilometres, there were few effectives left, and they were dog-tired. Every unit required replacements, armaments and ammunition.

The objective set by the Front Command was utterly incompatible with the forces and means at our disposal. This, however, was frequently the case at the time and we were used to commencing preparations for an operation with hunting about for whatever could be had on neighbouring sectors. Of course, this entailed a calculated risk, but there was no other way. In the present case, besides, the enemy, having achieved his objective, showed no signs of activity.

The CP was transferred to the village of Zherdevo, some twenty kilometres from the town. The strike force comprised General P. N. Chernyshov's 11th Guards Division and General Kiryukhin's 324th Division, both reinforced with artillery.

The regrouping and concentration began. The attack was set for the morning of the 29th of January. The troops went to the starting line at night; the artillery had occupied their positions earlier and prepared the firing schedules.

The main effort was to be delivered by Chernyshov's Guards, who were superior to the 324th numerically, in armaments and in experience. The 324th was assigned to carry out the auxiliary strike.

Everything was ready at the right time. I was at General Chernyshov's OP in the company of Kazakov and Oryol and we were already glancing at our watches when the field telephone buzzed. Chernyshov picked up the receiver, listened briefly, then exclaimed in blank amazement, "Impossible!"

What had happened?

It was certainly something to be amazed at. The regiment positioned closest to the city reported that several of the townspeople had crossed the line with the information that the Germans were leaving Sukhinichi in a state of panic. The regiment commander, a man of decision, had dispatched a reinforced reconnaissance patrol there, and was already following it up with a battalion and two tanks.

Only minutes remained till the beginning of the artillery preparation.

I found it hard to believe the reports. As a rule the Germans put up a stiff resistance in inhabited localities, and here was such a town! I read disbelief on my comrades' faces. Kazakov frowned and waved his hand deprecatingly—just another of Jerrys' tricks.

All the same I decided to withhold artillery fire. Kazakov sent the order to the batteries. Sounds of sporadic small-

arms fire reached us, obviously coming from the town. What was happening there?

The tension at the OP mounted. At last the telephone buzzed again. We all reached for the receiver, but let the signaller do his job. He said the division commander was wanted on the phone. We craned our necks. At last Chernyshov announced in a voice faltering with excitement,

"The regiment commander reports that the enemy has fled Sukhinichi. The reconnaissance group and battalion with tanks and regimental artillery are already in the town, and the main body of the regiment is coming up."

We all joined in a spontaneous "Hurrah!"

Both divisions were immediately assigned new tasks: to send out reinforced groups for pursuit and reconnaissance.

I called up Malinin. "Do not report to Front HQ until the situation is quite clear," I told him. "Prepare to move the CP into the town and immediately send me an operational group with means of communication."

Burning with impatience, we drove with all haste to the town, abandoned by the enemy, delighted that it had happened without bloodshed. Evidently our trick had worked and the Germans had decided to withdraw while the going was good. This was later confirmed.

By hook or by crook, as the saying goes, the objective set by the Front Commander had been achieved and Sukhinichi was in our hands.

Dawn had broken when we drove into the town, but the people stuck to their homes, evidently not at all sure that freedom had come again. Everywhere were signs of a hasty departure. Streets and courtyards were cluttered with abandoned materiel and equipment. A splendid car stood in the yard of General von Gilsa's quarters, fully intact and with no booby traps. In general, we found no mines. It could hardly have been a case of the Germans taking pity on the town. More likely than not they had taken to their heels, much too concerned with saving their skin to waste time planting mines and booby traps.

The enemy retreated some six kilometres south of the town. An attempt to breach the line with Kiryukhin's troops and the Guards was unsuccessful. We encountered a well-organised defence which the forces on the Sukhinichi sector could not hope to penetrate. I decided to call off the offensive and consolidate the success achieved.

The main thing was to hold Sukhinichi. The enemy might well recover from his shock and try to regain the important strategic point he had relinquished so easily. That same evening I transferred the whole 16th Army Headquarters to Sukhinichi, reasoning that with the Army Commander and his whole staff there no one would think that the town was likely to be abandoned.

Each headquarters and staff section and department was assigned an area it was to prepare for defence—and defend in the event of an enemy attack. The 11th Guards Division held the lines on the outskirts of the city, and Chernyshov set up his Command Post not far from us.

In the evening of January 29, we reported to the Front Commander that Sukhinichi had been taken. The people at Front HQ found it hard to believe us and one could hardly blame them, for the circumstances were highly unusual. Zhukov rang up and asked me to confirm the report. He seemed satisfied only when I told him that I was speaking from my headquarters actually in the town. Then he said that within a few days we should receive directives for the immediate future.

Meanwhile we proceeded to regroup the troops in the 16th Army zone with the idea of concentrating the stronger units on sectors liable to attack. We also gave serious attention to anti-aircraft defence, and I must say with remarkable results. The AA men set up camouflaged positions in sectors and on routes where the nazi airmen were particularly troublesome and began to shoot them down in increasing numbers. They soon realised they could no longer fly about with impunity and appeared less often and at much higher altitudes.

In Sukhinichi the staff set itself up well. True, we were close to the enemy lines, the town was spread out before the Germans' eyes. They shelled it frequently, and we had to dig slits and dugouts to keep losses down. The shelling came at intermittent periods of day and night, but we soon got accustomed and scarcely noticed it. We were quartered in houses, most of them quite comfortable.

The civilian population treated us splendidly, but each day saw less and less people in the city because of the continuous shelling and frequent air raids. It was hard for the civilians, especially women with children, to adapt themselves and they moved out into the rear for the time being. Vasily Kazakov did all he could to force the German

artillery farther away from the town, even installing 152-mm howitzers and camouflaging them in sheds.

Communication with the neighbouring armies was good, and we got down to organising co-operation at the boundaries.

Soon we received a directive from the Front Command in which the 16th Army was instructed, "While holding Sukhinichi firmly, the army will engage in offensive actions, continuing to wear down the enemy and denying him any opportunity of consolidating firmly and building up forces."

This was hardly a feasible task. It was one thing to wear the enemy down by defensive actions aimed at equalising the opposing forces—as we and other armies had done before the counteroffensive. But could we "wear down" and weaken the enemy by offensive actions with the balance of forces running clearly against us, and in the middle of a severe winter?

The enemy had been thrown back from Moscow and suffered a defeat. But he still retained his defensive ability and had finally succeeded in consolidating and was continuing to transfer fresh troops from the west, where his armies were not tied down by action on the part of our Allies. All our exhausted troops could do was force the enemy back at one point or another at the cost of great efforts and with negligible results. I frequently visited various sectors and units to investigate the meagre results of our offensive actions. Everything I saw led to the conclusion that decisive success was beyond our reach. The regiments and divisions were short of effectives, short of machine-guns, mortars, artillery ammunition, and there was no more than a handful of tanks.

The Germans had organised their defence on the basis of strong points in villages or groves, the gaps being mined and held under cross-fire. Our infantry attacked in thin skirmish lines clambering through deep snow under heavy fire; artillery support was weak owing to the shortage of ordnance and ammunition. Brave though the men were, they were exhausted and suffered heavy casualties long before the assault. before they had even caught a glimpse of the enemy. Would it not be better, I thought, to make use of the breathing spell we had gained to assume the defensive in order to build up forces and means for a powerful offensive?

According to information at our disposal, the enemy surpassed us considerably in strength. It was a paradoxical situation, with the stronger party on the defensive and the weaker attacking—and through waist-deep snow. All this, with relevant estimates and conclusions, was set forth in a detailed report submitted to the Front Commander.

The reply was curt: "Carry out orders!"

There was nothing for us to do but work out the ways and means of carrying out our task.

We had insufficient strength for extensive offensive operations, so we decided that in each case we would restrict ourselves to a definite, concrete objective. The most tempting targets were villages held by the enemy. Loss of every such point was a sensitive blow insofar as it caused a breach in his overall defence system.

The Germans took due account of the nature of the terrain and the winter conditions. All villages and homesteads in the front area and the rear echelons were turned into strong points surrounded by barbed wire, with mines planted on their approaches. Dugouts were equipped under houses, with loopholes for all-round fire. Tanks positioned for direct fire were used as armoured artillery and machine-gun emplacements.

This overall defence system suggested the idea of striking consecutively at one strong point after another, concentrating as much strength as possible without excessively weakening other sectors.

The first of these operations was carried out on the right flank with two incomplete divisions (they had to leave rear units to defend their sectors in case of an emergency), reinforced by artillery and ten T-34 tanks—all we could spare. The infantry occupied the line of departure under cover of night, tunnelling their way through the snow as close to the strong point as possible. Through the virgin snow the engineers dug trenches along which the tanks were to advance with the commencement of the artillery preparation. On joining the infantry they would assist them with direct fire from stationary positions and, in the last stage, help clear the battlefield of the enemy.

The artillery found their targets in advance, and several batteries were assigned for repulsing possible counterattacks on the right and left. In the night several AA batteries occupied well-camouflaged positions.

The operation was a success. By noon the village was cleared; many nazis were killed and the rest retreated to a forest six kilometres to the southwest. The counterattacks began in the afternoon, launched from the woods and a neighbouring strong point and supported by heavy fire and air attacks. These were repulsed, and the AA men brought down six German planes.

We saw that we had taken the right line and by continuing in the same way could achieve success at a minimum cost in lives.

An interesting thing happened in this engagement. An AA gun shot down one plane, and I saw the German pilot bail out at an altitude of about 2,000 metres and drop earthwards like a stone. His parachute never opened and he plunged into the snow. Several men ran to the spot. What was my surprise when I saw them returning with the German alive and not in bad shape! He had fallen into a deep gully filled with snow, and this had saved his life. I should never have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes.

OBJECT LESSONS

Our Army nibbled steadily at the enemy's defences, weakening them now at one point, now at another. We were incapable of breaching the front, but we methodically pushed it southwards, taking village after village, forcing the Germans back to the River Zhizdra.

Since the war people have often asked me wonderingly why in some operations, when we had more divisions than the enemy, we were unable to penetrate his defences. In fact, such questions were sometimes asked—accusingly—at the time. The reason was, of course, that one could not judge the correlation of forces according to the number of divisions involved on either side. We had long forgotten the time when a division comprised 8,000 effectives. Ours usually had about 3,500 men, sometimes only 2,000; on rare occasions there might be one of 4,000—and this was speedily brought down to par with the others after one or two engagements. At the same time, a German infantry division had at least 10,000 or 12,000 effectives, and a panzer or motorised, as much as 12,000 to 15,000. When a division suffered heavy losses the remaining rank and files and noncoms were used to replenish other divisions while the command personnel and staffs were withdrawn for reactivation.

In the winter of 1942, the forces on the Sukhinichi sector were far from equal. One can imagine the difficulties we experienced and the grave responsibility that rested on the army commanders. Unfortunately, not everyone reckoned with this. I recall the case of one visiting general representing the Front HQ. Just before the Sukhinichi engagement, he had criticised us in sweeping terms. Then, on orders from the Front Commander, he had visited the neighbouring 61st Army. There, too, nothing seemed to suit him. He took exception to all General M. M. Popov's measures and reported as much to Zhukov over the telephone. Zhukov reacted with his usual vigour, at once ordering the general

to assume command of the 61st Army and show his worth. The general hedged and dodged, claiming that after his instructions Popov would be able to cope and set matters right. But Zhukov was adamant, and he had to take over the Army—and the responsibility for it. Before the week was out the Germans had pushed forward 30 kilometres on his sector. The upshot was that the general was sent packing from the Western Front altogether and M. M. Popov resumed command of the 61st Army. I met Popov a year later shortly before the Battle of Kursk, when he was Commander of the Bryansk Front. We recalled the Sukhinichi sector and the case of the general from Front HQ—not gloatingly but marvelling at his behaviour.

Not far from Sukhinichi was a large village called Popkovo, situated on a hill dominating the surrounding terrain. It was the main position from which the Germans were shelling the town and it had to be seized. According to available information, the enemy force in the village comprised up to 2,000 effectives with tanks and assault guns, and had everything organised for all-round defence.

By that time—it was already February—we had somewhat replenished our units with men freed from nazi POW camps. One day Lobachov and Romanov, Chief of the Army Political Department, told me that our troops had captured several concentration camps in the neighbourhood of Kozelsk.

"We're looking for replacements, and here we have them under our very noses," Lobachov remarked.

This was true enough. We dispatched a team of staff officers, political officers and doctors who screened out all the physically fit men. They had endured so much in prison that they were ready to face any danger for the sake of revenge on the hated enemy.

The Front Commander also assigned our Army an infantry division (97th) and two tank brigades. This was great, and it roused our spirits enormously.

Having occupied the new sector, we surveyed the dislocation areas and got to know the local population remaining in their homes. We felt that the people were now confident that the nightmare of occupation was a thing of the past never to be repeated. Many people were returning from the rear and life was noticeably settling down. Lobachov and the Army Political Department got in touch with the Secretary of the Smolensk Regional Party Committee,

D. M. Popov, whom I had met back at Yartsevo. He was now one of the leaders of the partisan movement.

The partisans helped us greatly both with the blows they dealt the enemy and the information they supplied about his troops and the situation in the rear. The Army Intelligence Department worked in close contact with the partisan groups of Orlov, Batya, Soldatenkov and Oreshkin operating in the Bryansk, Dyatkovo and Zhizdra districts. We reciprocated by helping the partisans with weapons, ammunition and explosives; the Political Department supplied them with materials for work with the population.

With the help of the 16th Army, the partisan headquarters transported reinforcements to the partisans across the frontline. In particular, in February a large troop of skiers comprising Communists and Komsomols crossed into the enemy rear. A tough detachment under A. P. Shestakov crossed the frontline and took up positions along the Bryansk-Gomel railway, where it terrorised the Germans for a long time and gathered valuable information for us.

All this time Moscow and, one might even say, the whole country continued to give the 16th Army its attention. Delegations of workers and farmers arrived from the capital, from Central Asia and even from the distant Transbaikal area, which I remember only too well from the time of my service there in the twenties. Shortly before the fighting for Popkovo began, delegates from the capital's Leningrad District arrived and, naturally, hastened to visit the 11th Guards Division, which had been fathered by the district. They attended the ceremony of the presentation of the Guards Colours. As General Chernyshov kneeled and kissed the hem of the crimson banner, many of those present recalled that six months earlier volunteers from Leningrad District of Moscow had formed the core of this now famous force.

The planned attack against the enemy's major strong point at Popkovo began at the end of February. The main effort was delivered by the 146th Tank Brigade, which had several dozen T-34 and KV tanks. The neighbouring divisions were assigned the task of pinning down the enemy entrenched in the surrounding villages.

The attack was well prepared. All troop movements were carried out at night. The engagement began with an artillery preparation. Then tanks with tank-borne infantry

moved out along trenches dug in the night through the deep snow, followed by infantry accompanied by a rolling barrage of artillery fire. Guns positioned in the darkness for direct fire did good work in destroying enemy fire emplacements and tanks.

The enemy resisted stubbornly, but in the afternoon Popkovo was taken. Fighting persisted for some time around the stone church on a hilltop and in the cemetery, but then the last resisting pockets were quelled. The nazis left more than seven hundred dead on the battlefield, as well as a great number of weapons and materiel. Most important, they had lost a key stronghold in their defence system.

Next on the order of the day was Maklaki, a village 15 kilometres southwest of Popkovo. We reasoned at headquarters that if we added this strong point to our tally, practically all the German defences in the Zhizdra sector would be breached. Then all we should have to do would be to seize the village of Bryn and other small villages scattered over the wide, woodless plain, and the enemy would be compelled to draw beyond the Zhizdra. We set about preparing for this.

The 16th Army's position on the Sukhinichi sector had greatly improved. With the German artillery knocked out of range of the town, our headquarters felt much better. Everything was proceeding nicely, and the conviction grew that the enemy would not hold Maklaki for much longer. On March 8, with a group of comrades I visited the units assigned to storm this last major enemy strong point, returning to the CP in an aero-sleigh.

Incidentally, there is a story connected with aero-sleighs. The snows were deep that year and roads were few. We made a rule of maintaining personal contact with all Army units, however extended our positions. On our request, General Sokolovsky sent us an aero-sleighs company, each vehicle armed with a light machine-gun. The company, which was stationed with the logistical headquarters, proved very useful, and not only for personal contacts, as it turned out.

One night in the second half of February, a troop of German skiers numbering some two hundred-odd men penetrated into our rear and intercepted the road along which the Army's right wing received all its supplies. This created a critical situation. Our Chief of Communications, Colonel P. Y. Maksimenko, happened to be in the aero-sleigh company

at the time, and he suggested using it to deal with this impudent attack.

The company swiftly moved into the area occupied by the German skiers, deployed and went straight into the attack, opening fire from its fourteen machine-guns. The nazis were scattered and annihilated, only a few saved their lives by making for the brush on the edge of the woods. The prisoners taken in this engagement declared in unison that they had been completely overwhelmed by the attack: they had first taken the aero-sleighs for tanks and were dumbfounded when the machines appeared to skim over the deep snow. (The only weak point of this excellent winter machine was its propeller, which prevented it from being used on narrow forest lanes or over bushes.)

I later described this engagement to Ilya Ehrenburg when he visited us at Sukhinichi, and I recall him poring over the letters and documents taken from the killed German skiers, selecting useful items for his bitter and impassioned articles in *Krasnaya Zvezda*.[1]

Well, the aero-sleigh carried me swiftly and with the greatest comfort from Maklaki to the CP, where I had to consider the orders for following up the seizure of the strong point. Later in the evening we intended to attend a meeting devoted to International Women's Day. As usual, there were several of us busy at headquarters, including Malinin, Kazakov and other staff officers. Just as I picked up a pen to sign the orders a high-explosive shell went off under the window and a fragment hit me in the back.

I felt a powerful blow. "I think I've had it," the words barely escaped my lips.

The wound proved serious, and on orders from the Front Commander I was evacuated by plane to Moscow to a hospital housed in the buildings of the Timiryazev Agricultural Academy.

This was my third wound since my service in the Red Army began, and it was quite unlike the previous ones.

On November 7, 1919, the Separate Urals Cavalry Battalion, of which I was in command, broke through the lines of the Kolchak troops in the middle of the night and found out that the Omsk Group's HQ had been set up in the Cossack village of Karaulnaya. We attacked the village from the rear and, crushing the whiteguards' resistance, scattered

[1] *Red Star*, the Soviet Army newspaper.—*Tr.*

the headquarters, taking prisoners, including many officers. During the raid I clashed in a hand-to-hand fight with General Voskresensky, the Omsk Group Commander, receiving from him a bullet through the shoulder while he received a mortal slash from my sabre.

In June 1921, the Red Army was mopping up Baron Ungern's troops on the Mongolian border. At Zhelturinskaya village, when in command of the 35th Cavalry Regiment, I attacked the Ungern cavalry which had broken through our infantry and, after cutting down several enemy horsemen, was wounded the second time, this time in the leg, with the fracture of a bone.

Those wounds had been received in the heat of battle, meeting the enemy head-on, hand-to-hand. But this time.... Sitting in a room, pen in hand, a stray shell exploding nearby.... Times had certainly changed. It was a different kind of war, and I held a different post.... Of course, if due precautions had been taken it might never have occurred, but as it was I was bedridden now for some time. I was angry and annoyed at having been put out of action just when the Army was preparing to clear the northern bank of the Zhizdra of the enemy.

Nevertheless, thanks to the help of the doctors and a strong constitution, I soon began to recover. In hospital I could feel for myself the love and attention with which our people surrounded the soldiers wounded in battle. Not a day passed without someone visiting us. The wounded were literally showered with gifts and letters. Men and women, workers and farmers, writers and newspaper correspondents, actors and artists came in an unending stream. Young Pioneers with red ties walked shyly in with shining childish eyes. This heart-warming concern was the best of all medicines, though the hospital authorities tried to limit the stream of well-wishers.

While recuperating I was finally able to locate my wife and daughter. Evacuated from the frontline area at the beginning of the war, they had landed first in Kazakhstan, then in Novosibirsk. When G. M. Popov, Secretary of the Moscow Party Committee, visited me, he suggested that I should move my family to Moscow and helped me get a flat for them.

Life in Moscow was steadily improving. The blackout was still on, but the grim alertness was gone. Theatres and cinemas were open and lively crowds thronged the streets.

German air raids had ceased, though towards evening soldiers could be seen towing barrage balloons—"sausages" they called them—along boulevards to the outskirts where they would be lifted aloft.

My comrades from the 16th Army did not forget me and kept me constantly posted on all events, so that I could feel the Army's pulse. We were a close-knit team cemented by a genuine army friendship, and I missed my comrades very much. Even before I had recuperated completely I decided that I had been away enough, and in May I rejoined the troops.

The headquarters had moved out of Sukhinichi, and Malinin had pitched the CP in a wood. The Army had thrown the Germans beyond the Zhizdra and there was a lull in the fighting. The losses sustained in two months of offensive operations proved substantial. Colonel P. A. Yeryomin, Commander of the 328th Division, had been gravely wounded; for gallantry in action his division had been recommended for the title of Guards Division; the Commander of the 324th Infantry, Hero of the Soviet Union I. Y. Kravchenko, had been killed in action.

As soon as I arrived I plunged into combat affairs. A directive from the Front Command provided for yet another offensive operation, to be undertaken in co-operation with M. M. Popov. We received reinforcements in the shape of an armour corps. The three divisions deployed on the right flank were brought together into an infantry corps, which considerably facilitated troop control. General N. A. Orlov was appointed corps commander. (The corps system had existed in the Red Army before. In the heavy defensive battles of 1941 it had been temporarily abandoned but, whenever possible, the corps were restored.)

Kazakov and I went to the 61st Army to work out co-ordination. The Army Commander, M. M. Popov, greeted us warmly. He turned out to be a pleasant person to talk to and a level-headed military leader, and we had a friendly and thorough discussion about forthcoming operations by our armies, which were to strike on adjacent flanks. Popov's army, like mine, was very short of manpower. We collected all we could for the coming engagement, returning all convalescents from hospitals and scouring the army and immediate rear. But it was no more than a drop in the ocean. Neither Popov nor I could afford to weaken the defences on other sectors to amass a sufficiently powerful force to

ensure a breakthrough and subsequent exploitation of the success. Besides, by now the Germans themselves were beginning to show signs of activity. There could be no question of an offensive along our armies' whole frontage. The strike was limited to a small sector of the enemy defences, making it possible for the enemy to counter with forces taken from unengaged sectors.

The operation began at the end of May. Under cover of night our troops concentrated and occupied the lines of departure. Owing to our shortage of infantry the divisions' battle formations had to be deployed in one echelon, with a small reserve at the disposal of each divisional commander. This was compensated by placing the armour corps in the second echelon with the task of developing the breach in depth. The infantry divisions received some 12 to 15 tanks each for immediate support.

The artillery had already got the range of its targets with individual guns and now moved out to its positions, including direct-fire positions. This time we were able to concentrate 30 to 40 guns per kilometre of frontage on the main sector.

M. S. Malinin, being a former tankman, asked to be allowed to plan the commitment of the armoured corps to battle. I agreed, knowing his punctuality in everything he undertook. Together with the tank commander he drew up a schedule detailed down to the last hour and minute. The only thing that worried me was that the corps' line of departure was set far from the front—some twenty kilometres—and I feared the tanks might encounter some unexpected delay. However, I was assured that every contingency had been provided for, while the distance factor would make for complete surprise as the Germans would not hear the preliminary rumble of engines. Shelving my misgivings, I accepted their plan.

From the OP I could follow all the stages of the battle. The ammunition situation was a little better and we could afford a thirty-minute artillery preparation before the attack —but no more. When it ended, infantry and tanks advanced rapidly towards the enemy positions. The nazi batteries opened up with some desultory fire, then machine-guns joined in, but they were quickly suppressed by the tank escort and direct-laying guns. We saw the infantry swarm into the forward enemy trenches, overcome them quickly and push on. Some of the tanks stayed back to clear the first trench while the rest forged ahead, delivering mainly

gun fire though the retreating infantry presented a more suitable target for their machine-guns. (In general I noticed that our tankmen seemed to prefer gun to machine-gun fire, resorting to it whether it was necessary or not.)

Now the infantry attacked the second line with cries of "Hurrah!" Our tanks were there too, firing from stationary positions. Some of them were on fire. The fighting spread along the trenches as infantry and a number of tanks overcame the second line of trenches at several points and pursued the enemy, who continued to snap back with small-arms fire.

Now was the time to bring in the armoured corps. However, it failed to show up. It had been "smooth on paper, but they forgot about the gullies", as a Russian saying has it. The corps' approach routes crossed a paltry brook with marshy banks, and the tanks had got bogged down there. The commanders had not reconnoitered the terrain before drawing up the plan, the result being a delay that tipped the scales against a successfully launched operation. This unfortunate event taught us all a good lesson for the future.

It took two hours for the corps to extricate itself from the bog and reach the battlefield; two hours which the Germans did not waste. They brought up forces from the rear and other sectors and the right-flank division of our attacking force began to take prisoners from units known to be dislocated in front of the 10th Army; units of a motorised division from Bryansk appeared opposite the centre. In spite of this, our infantry forged ahead, overcoming enemy resistance, and by the time the armoured corps began to deploy in battle formation they had advanced nearly ten kilometres.

We were still confident that we would breach the enemy defences and occupy Zhizdra, throwing open the road to Bryansk. The enemy command was evidently thinking along the same lines and, in an attempt to gain time, they now called out the air force. Forty dive-bombers circled over the battlefield. They began by attacking the advanced tank brigade, which had deployed very beautifully and was now coming over a hill two or three kilometres behind the advancing infantry. And at this point something quite incredible happened. Instead of dashing forward the brigade suddenly ground to a halt. There it stood on the bare slopes while the Junkers planes rained bombs upon it. Then a new

armada of some thirty bombers escorted by fighters appeared in the air.

I could not just stand still and watch this happening. I ordered the corps commander to speed up his main forces and carry out his assignment. The Corps Commissar Latyshev, Colonel Oryol, several staff officers and I bundled into cars and raced towards the tank brigade, stationary under a shower of bombs. Oryol ran up to one tank and pounded on its armour with a stone, calling for the commander. Latyshev followed suit, and so did I, warily, because of the danger of being crushed under the tracks if the driver suddenly took it into his head to turn. It was an uncomfortable position to be in. Fortunately, we came to no harm and got the brigade moving on to reinforce the infantry, which by now was hard pressed.

But much time had been wasted, in which the enemy had brought up more and more new troops. Tanks and assault guns came into action on his side, and some of the bombers switched their attack to the infantry. The situation deteriorated sharply. Our infantry took cover and could scarcely beat back enemy counterattacks. The armoured corps, harrassed by the enemy bombing, scattered all over the field without advancing. Something had to be done to consolidate our gains. I ordered the troops to dig in and temporarily assume the defensive. Some of the tanks joined the infantry battle formations, while the corps' main forces remained as my reserve.

When the enemy aircraft had appeared over the battlefield we had requested help from the Front Command, at least of fighters. This we received, and soon groups of our aircraft appeared in the sky. They were too few, however, to bring the infantry much relief.

Nevertheless, the nazis were unable to regain the territory we had won. Defensive fighting continued for several days. Our neighbour on the left had also scored some minor successes and now also assumed the defensive. On the whole we had failed to carry out our mission, but at least we had worried and rattled the enemy. Not for nothing had they brought in such a large air force over such a small sector.

We analysed the tank brigade's behaviour. For most of the tankmen this was their first battle, and they had been overwhelmed by the frenzied bombing. Subsequently the brigade had picked up and fought well, helping the

infantry units to hold their positions and repelling enemy panzer attacks.

Anything can happen in war, so it was with this brigade, and the corps as a whole. The most surprising thing of all, though, was that the tank crews had actually got away with nothing worse than a big scare. There had been moments when flames, smoke and dust from exploding bombs completely hid the tanks from view. One would have expected only a heap of twisted metal to emerge. But in fact only two tanks were damaged. It doesn't always work out like that. As tankmen know only too well.

In June the 16th Army attempted another offensive, again in the direction of Bryansk. On orders from the Front Command, stronger forces were used, but the fighting nevertheless remained of a local nature.

The Front Commander arrived in person to observe the fighting, accompanied by the Air Force Commander.

Our neighbours, the 10th and 61st Armies, had been assigned only to pin down the enemy by stepping up activity. The artillery support was somewhat less than in May as the assault frontage was wider. There were fewer tanks, but this, in Zhukov's view, was compensated by aircraft, which would be participating in considerable force.

Zhukov checked the troops' readiness for action and declared himself satisfied; he also accepted the proposed plan and gave the go-ahead for the attack at dawn on the following day. On the eve of the operation co-ordination between the air force and infantry was worked out and the signals for demarcating the forward line were agreed upon.

My OP was located on a hill presenting an excellent view of the country ahead and on either side. The trenches were concealed by low shrubs. The offensive began with a brief artillery preparation. Bombers struck at targets in depth while attack aircraft strafed enemy infantry positions. Then the infantry units went over the top, accompanied by tanks. We saw them take the first trenches and forge ahead, but then a hitch occurred. The enemy counterattacked with a large tank force and dense lines of infantry.

In this battle our attack aircraft used rockets for the first time, and they proved an effective weapon. In fact we were suddenly entertained with an object demonstration of their worth on our own persons. We were saved by sheer intuition. Zhukov, Kazakov, I and the other commanders watching the battle had climbed out of the trenches and were stand-

ing on the breastwork when I noticed a flight of nine attack aircraft approaching. Here it comes, the thought flashed through my mind. With complete disregard for rank I ordered the generals to take cover in the trench. We had hardly done so when a salvo of rocket projectiles rained down. Deafening blasts erupted on all sides, chunks of earth showered down and fragments whizzed by....

Meanwhile, despite our troops' efforts and substantial air support, the fighting dragged on, with the men unable to advance. By noon the enemy had brought in sufficient forces to compel our units to withdraw to the line of departure. The enemy achieved air supremacy.

At this point the 16th Army's offensive actions came to an end. On orders from the Front it at last assumed the defensive. I still consider that the winter offensives of both the Western and Kalinin Fronts failed to yield the expected results. The operations petered out inconclusively. By forcing out the enemy we frequently placed ourselves in unfavourable conditions, stretching out the front, which in some places curved and looped in a most preposterous fashion. Very often the enemy sliced off the salients.

Every military operation must be based on an all-round and thorough assessment of forces, means and possibilities—both one's own and the enemy's.

At the beginning of July, Zhukov called me up to inquire whether I thought Malinin could cope with the job of Army Commander. Wondering what this was all about, I replied in the affirmative. He then told me that GHQ intended to appoint me Commander of the Bryansk Front.

"Tell Malinin," Zhukov said, "and fly to Moscow as soon as you get your orders from GHQ."

I was somewhat disconcerted. In command of an army I felt confident and in my proper place. But a Front, a group of armies? I hinted that perhaps I should stay where I was, but received a flat refusal. Well, I would have to overcome my fears.

It was sad to part with the 16th Army, with the close-knit, friendly team that we had built up. We had gone through the bitterness of defeat and joy of victory together. I knew the men and their commanders, and they knew me. This is of great importance in war. Still, we had to part. My consolation was that the new people I was going to meet

would be no worse. It would be up to me to win their confidence and respect.

That evening the orders arrived. Malinin declared frankly that he could not shoulder the responsibility an Army Commander had to bear, and asked to be left as Chief of Staff. Zhukov agreed, and General Ivan Bagramyan was appointed Commander of the 16th Army. It pleased me to know that the Army had been placed in good hands.

At GHQ I was cordially greeted by the Supreme Commander. Stalin outlined the situation on the Voronezh sector, then asked if I knew of qualified officers for the Bryansk Front Headquarters and Command.

(A portion of the troops and command of the Bryansk Front was being handed over to the new Voronezh Front, which was to occupy positions between the Bryansk and Southwestern Fronts.) I named M. S. Malinin, V. I. Kazakov, G. N. Oryol and P. Y. Maksimenko. Stalin immediately ordered the Western Front Commander to release the men. He wished me success in my new job and told me not to allow myself to be delayed at the General Staff. I should hasten to the front as a very serious situation was developing at Voronezh.

Major events were developing on the Voronezh sector and southwards and I was destined to participate. I realised that I should have to work hard to be able to cope with this new command and justify the trust of the Party and the Government. The details are hard to describe, but one episode impressed itself on my memory. Shortly before the Voronezh operation I came again to Moscow to report to the Supreme Commander. When I had finished and was about to leave, Stalin said, "Don't go yet."

He phoned Poskryobyshev and asked him to call in a general just removed from the command of a Front. The following dialogue took place:

"You say that we have punished you wrongly?"

"Yes, because the GHQ representative kept getting in my way."

"How?"

"He interfered with my orders, held conferences when it was necessary to act, gave contradictory instructions. . . . In general he tried to override the commander."

"So he got in your way. But you were in command of the Front?"

"Yes."

"The Party and the Government entrusted the Front to *you*.... Did you have a telephone?"

"Yes."

"Then why didn't you report that he was getting in your way?"

"I didn't dare complain about your representative."

"Well, that is what we have punished you for: not daring to pick up the receiver and phone up, as a result of which you failed to carry out the operation."

I walked out of the Supreme Commander's office with the thought that, as a new-fledged Front Commander, I had just been taught an object lesson. Believe me, I made the most of it.

THE BRYANSK FRONT

I missed the Chief of the General Staff, A. M. Vasilevsky, who had gone to the Voronezh area, where fierce fighting was taking place. According to information in hand at the General Staff, the situation seemed to be grave. Having recovered from the defeat at Moscow, the nazi high command had succeeded by the summer of 1942 in replenishing its troops with manpower and armaments. The absence of a second front in Europe had enabled it to transfer fresh divisions from France and Belgium, and large forces had been concentrated on the southern wing of the Soviet-German front. On June 28, exploiting the reverses suffered by our troops in the spring operations in the Crimea and at Kharkov, the nazis launched an offensive on the Voronezh sector. The main blow was delivered at the boundary between the Bryansk and Southwestern Fronts. Here the enemy broke through our defences and began advancing rapidly in a southeasterly direction. Once again the initiative was in enemy hands.

The situation was further aggravated by the fact that the winter fighting had used up a lot of troops and materiel and we had been unable to build up large strategic reserves in time for the summer campaign.

The Bryansk Front HQ was located in the village of Nizhni Olshanets, some 15 kilometres east of Yelets. The Chief of Staff was General M. I. Kazakov, whose acquaintance I had to make with the fighting at its height. He impressed me greatly and seemed admirably suited to his office. He quickly brought me up to date on the situation offering a clearcut and correct evaluation of the condition and possibilities of the armies under my control.

The Bryansk Front comprised P. P. Korzun's 3rd Army, G. A. Khalyuzin's 48th Army, N. P. Pukhov's 13th Army, N. Y. Chibisov's 38th Army (in the activation stage), A. I. Lizyukov's 5th Tank Army, the 1st and 16th Tank Corps and a cavalry corps.

I had to take the wheel with the car moving, so to speak. Stubborn fighting was going on. The enemy had already reached the Don and, while directing his main effort to the southeast, he struck north with part of his forces along the river's west bank, striving to widen the breach. The 13th and 5th Tank Armies were fighting defensive battles on the left wing of the Bryansk Front to prevent this. GHQ had recently attempted a counterattack against the enemy troops that had penetrated the boundary between our two fronts. The 5th Tank Army had been assigned the task of cutting the communications of the enemy group heading towards the Don, attacking it from the rear and thus preventing it from capturing Voronezh.

The person best suited to organise and execute this bold and promising operation would surely have been the Commander of the Bryansk Front, who could bring in other forces to reinforce the 5th Army. However, it had been decided that the counterattack should be undertaken from another direction.

This poorly organised and irresolutely carried out operation was unsuccessful and the enemy assumed the offensive on this sector too. True, he was forced to commit large forces here, somewhat to the detriment of his main grouping, but this was a poor consolation. The events of those days have been described exhaustively and objectively by General M. I. Kazakov in his book, *Over the Map of Past Campaigns*, and I shall not go into the details.

On the sector held by the 5th Tank Army the situation steadily deteriorated as the enemy continued to push ahead. Reinforcements were urgently needed, and I moved up General P. A. Rotmistrov's 7th Tank Corps from the Front reserve.

It was flat, open country and the whole battle could be watched from the OP overlooking the area. Our troops slowly fell back before the enemy, advancing along a broad front. The attack was led by small groups of tanks, firing their guns, usually when stationary. Behind them came the infantry, taking cover from time to time and keeping up a steady stream of submachine-gun fire. Away on the horizon approaching columns of tanks and trucks could be glimpsed through thick clouds of dust.

Our antitank artillery hit back with moderate accuracy, shifting positions quickly gun by gun or battery by battery, opening up again, delaying the enemy's movement and

giving cover to our retreating infantry, which also hit back with machine-gun and mortar fire. So far the retreat was proceeding in an orderly fashion, but it was apparent that as soon as the enemy brought in his main forces he would easily overrun our troops.

However, at that moment the 7th Tank Corps arrived, quickly deployed and went in to meet the enemy's main tank force. All our artillery, including that of the tank corps, joined in a consorted bombardment. The *katyusha* salvos were especially effective.

Clouds of dust enveloped the battlefield, daggers of small-arms fire and shell bursts glimmering dimly through it. In many places columns of black smoke rose skywards as enemy tanks went up in flames. Our infantry rallied and charged in the wake of the tanks. The enemy halted, hesitated, then fell back before this consorted attack, suffering heavy losses.

There were a few isolated enemy planes overhead which hardly interfered in the fighting, and none of ours at all. We succeeded in repulsing the enemy attack, but all our attempts to exploit this initial success were in vain.

Among the casualties in this battle was General Lizyukov, Commander of the 5th Tank Army. He had been moving with one of his units when it seemed to him that his men were not being resolute enough. To inspire his men, he threw his KV tank forward, tore into the enemy ranks—and lost his life there.

His death was a great personal loss to me. I had first met him on the Yartsevo sector and knew him as a brave man and gallant fighter. He was an excellent brigade commander and would have been a good corps commander, but a tank army was out of his depth. This was a new, hastily formed unit and, furthermore, we simply lacked the experience of wielding such huge masses of tanks. It was the Army's first engagement, the situation was tense and complicated, and this was bound to tell on the Army's behaviour. There had been some cause for the commander's act of desperation.

Soon the 5th Tank Army command and headquarters were withdrawn to the General Headquarters Reserves, while the corps were subordinated directly to the Front. This was probably the best temporary solution, as neither the situation nor our possibilities could as yet warrant the creation of such large armoured formations.

Having repelled all the enemy's attempts to advance northward along the Don, the troops of the Bryansk Front assumed the defensive. Our neighbour on the left was still engaged in local fighting in and around Voronezh, but little by little it petered out. The main events developed to the south and southwest, where the enemy, having forced the newly organised Voronezh Front, now under the command of General N. F. Vatutin, across the Don, continued to develop the offensive southward along the river's western bank.

On orders from GHQ, we proceeded to organise fortified defences on our sector. I took advantage of the breathing space to inspect the troops with a group of the Front staff and political officers. On our right flank the fighting had quietened down back in June. The 3rd Army had used the time to dig in firmly and was continuing to strengthen its defences. The Army Commander was General P. P. Korzun, a former cavalryman and now reasonably good infantry commander. He had a fine team of experienced commanders capable of leading their troops ably and firmly. I was also satisfied with the 48th Army commanded by General Khalyuzin. True, both armies were short of men and weapons, especially automatic, but in those days this was a common trouble.

The commanders jealously saw to it that all their wounded and sick men should return to their units after convalescence. Our heroic medical personnel, for their part, spared no effort in providing the best possible treatment to put our disabled officers and men back into service as quickly as possible. I must say they succeeded admirably.

A lull set in on the sector of our neighbour to the right, the Western Front. Our 61st Army, still under General M. M. Popov's command, was handed over to them, and we worked out boundary co-ordination measures for both fronts.

On the left flank, General Pukhov's 13th and General Chibisov's 38th Army were busy in setting up strong, deeply echeloned defences. Combat operations here were restricted to reconnaissance on both sides with brief exchanges of artillery and mortar fire. Army Commander N. P. Pukhov, an energetic and enterprising general with a fine background of military training and practical experience, had had ample opportunity to display his excellent qualities in the recent fighting, which had taken place in very complex conditions. The Army Command was well knit and acted with resolve and initiative.

General N. Y. Chibisov had assumed command of the 38th Army only recently, having been Deputy Commander of the Bryansk Front. Judging by his qualifications, he was undoubtedly in the right place, and he commanded the Army ably. I was somewhat troubled, though, by his unhurriedness, which amounted almost to apathy. I should have liked to see an army commander react faster to events, but this was a part of his character and was not easily altered.

An incident that occurred at the height of the fighting at Voronezh comes to mind. I was in the 38th's sector when I received information that the enemy had attacked suddenly on one of the sectors and pushed our troops back. Greatly worried, I hastened to the Army CP. I found the Army Commander sitting at a table on which a samovar was humming merrily. He was in the best of spirits and to my query whether he was aware of the situation on the flank replied placidly that he had not yet ascertained it in full but was confident that nothing alarming had happened. And he invited me to join him at his tea.

This truly Olympian calm in such an alarming situation roused my indignation and I rebuked Chibisov in sharp terms. It worked. He went about his duties energetically, ordering troops to be rushed to the threatened sector. The enemy was repulsed, though I had to help Chibisov with reinforcements from the Front reserve.

In August we received replenishments in the shape of an infantry brigade, made up of men sentenced to various terms for criminal offences, yesterday's convicts who had volunteered for the front to expiate their crimes in battle. The Government had shown its trust in the sincerity of their desire—and now here they were. The men quickly adapted to the situation, and soon we saw that they could be entrusted with the toughest assignments. We employed the brigade mostly for reconnaissance in force. It fought hard and compelled the enemy to expose his fire system *in toto*. Between engagements we deployed the brigade on sectors where an over-peaceful situation developed. On the very first night the greatest dare-devils among them raided the enemy positions, returning with prisoners and booty. Neither did they give the nazis respite in daytime. They put out some crack snipers who lay in wait for their quarry for hours on end and rarely let them off alive. The Germans dared not show their noses out of the trenches.

In short, the brigade fought well. Most of its men had their sentences remitted, and many were decorated for valour and distinguished service. It is my firm belief that even men who have fallen foul of the law can and should be trusted. Give such a person a chance to expiate his guilt, and you will find that the good in him will take the upper hand, that love for his country and his people, the desire to win back their confidence at all costs, will make him a brave soldier.

We knew very little of the development of events on the Southwestern Front. All the general communiqués mentioned heavy fighting, and gave no details.

In the latter half of August I was suddenly summonned to see Stalin at GHQ. My left-hand neighbour, General Vatutin, was there. The question under consideration was the liberation of Voronezh. Vatutin suggested a frontal attack on the city with all the forces of the Voronezh Front. We were to help him by stepping up activities of our 38th Army on the left flank to pin down the enemy on the western bank of the Don. I knew that Vatutin had tried unsuccessfully to take Voronezh by frontal attack several times. The enemy was firmly entrenched, and before assaulting the city our troops advancing from the east had to force the rivers Don and Voronezh. I suggested another variant: the main strike should be delivered from the western, instead of the eastern, bank of the Don, exploiting the favourable position of the 38th Army, poised over the enemy's flank north of Voronezh. This would entail redeploying large forces as secretly as possible. The enemy would thus be attacked from the flank, and our troops would come out behind the units holding the city. Additionally, the strike would inevitably compel the enemy to weaken his forces advancing against the Southwestern Front. I was firmly convinced that in the circumstances my variant was the only correct one.

However, Vatutin stubbornly defended his own plan, and my arguments were apparently not powerful enough. The promise that, if my variant was accepted, the Bryansk Front would detail all the troops we could assemble without detriment to our own defences, had no effect either. Stalin accepted Vatutin's plan, promising to reinforce the Voronezh Front with large units from the GHQ and Guards mortar regiments using M-31 launchers equipped with highly destructive rockets.

With that Stalin dismissed us. Vatutin and I stepped out into the next room, where we settled all questions pertaining to the operations of the 38th Army, which was to be subordinated to Voronezh Front for the operation.

The situation on the Bryansk Front remained calm. The enemy was inactive and we observed no significant changes in his forces. The 38th Army began preparing for the offensive and waited for the signal from the Voronezh Front HQ.

Our staff was replenished with new commanders. Several persons arrived from the 16th Army, notably M. S. Malinin, who became Chief of Staff in place of M. I. Kazakov who was moved to Voronezh Front, V. I. Kazakov took over as Front Chief of Artillery, and P. Y. Maksimenko became Front Communications Chief. All of them were old friends with whom I had worked successfully before. The Chief of Logistics was General N. A. Antipenko, a live wire, with an excellent knowledge of his job. My deputy in charge of troop activation was General P. I. Batov, a fine old combatant officer with good organising ability. From the outset I saw that he was unhappy in his job. A man of such ebullient energy found it hard to lead the inactive life of a staff officer.

The political work in the Army was headed by General S. I. Shabalin, Member of the Military Council, a gifted man who knew how to give purpose to the work of the political machinery and Party organisations.

In short, the Bryansk Front was well staffed with command personnel capable of leading the troops in any combat conditions.

The deadline for the Voronezh Front operation was shifted several times, until it finally began in the first half of September. The previous attempts to attack on this direction and the protracted preparations for the new operation had naturally alerted the enemy. He had consolidated his positions and brought up fresh forces. Our attacks were unsuccessful, yet, hopeless as they were, they continued until GHQ intervened and called off the offensive. The troops of the Voronezh Front assumed the defensive along the eastern bank of the Don.

By then the situation on the Stalingrad sector had deteriorated sharply. The enemy had forced the Don, swept through the country between the Don and the Volga and broken into Stalingrad.

Some time in the second half of August, I spoke twice with Stalin over the phone. The gist of these conversations was that the situation at Stalingrad was grave and our Front should assign troops to reinforce this sector. I replied that the best help could be provided by armour. Stalin readily agreed, and we urgently dispatched two tank corps—M. Y. Katukov's and P. A. Rotmistrov's—to the Volga. After both conversations Stalin asked me to consider what else could be done to help the defenders of Stalingrad.

In September Stalin rang me again. I was ready to say that I could release the Front's last armour corps, the 16th (very weak), but, to my surprise, Stalin instead inquired about the situation on our sector. When I reported briefly that there was a complete lull, he asked whether I did not find the situation too dull for my liking. When I replied in the affirmative he ordered me to come to Moscow.

Completely ignorant of the reason for the summons, I took a few documents relating to the condition of the troops that might be of use and on the following day left for the capital by car.

At GHQ I was received by Zhukov, who outlined the situation at Stalingrad and then briefed me on my new assignment. The plan was to concentrate a strong force (no less than three combined armies and several armour corps) on the flank of the enemy occupying the country between the Don and the Volga with the purpose of counterattacking south and southeast from the vicinity of Serafimovich. The idea was bold and looked promising. I was to be the commander of this force, with Generals Kozlov and Golubev under me, to command the newly forming armies. The third army was already in the area where the concentration of troops was to begin.

As soon as I received the assignment, while still in Moscow, I took steps towards carrying it out. I got the details of the reinforcing means that would be attached to us, and settled the question of command personnel. Malinin was appointed Chief of Staff and, at my request, Kozlov was replaced by Batov as army commander.

However, before I had got down to the job in earnest I was summoned urgently to see the Supreme Commander, who told me that in view of the grave situation—the enemy had reached the Volga in places—the operation was being called off and the troops designated for it were being dis-

patched direct to Stalingrad. I was to fly there at once and assume command of the Stalingrad Front.

"All other instructions you will receive on the spot from my deputy, General Zhukov, who is also flying to Stalingrad."

I walked out of Stalin's office with gloomy thoughts. Once again I had been deprived of the opportunity of executing a correctly conceived counterblow. The only consolation was that I was being sent to the scene of fierce fighting, not back to a calm sector.

AT STALINGRAD

The trip in the Li-2 transport plane was uneventful. We flew low, hedgehopping all the way, a trick the war had taught us. Planes hugging the ground like this were rarely brought down.

Zhukov and I drove in the awaiting cars straight from the airfield to the Stalingrad Front Commander's OP east of Yerzovka. A fierce battle was raging. Units on the Front's left wing were attacking enemy forces that had broken through to the Volga on the Market, Akatovka sector in the northern outskirts of Stalingrad.

The fighting had been going on for more than two days, but the enemy would not be dislodged. His positions dominated the ground, our troops were in full view, and he did not stint artillery or mortar shells. Shells were bursting all along the front as far as the eye could see. Here and there Soviet tanks smouldered amidst the lines of prone infantry. As soon as a tank of ours reached the crest of the slope it was hit and went up in flames. Evidently the German artillery was well ranged on the ridge.

The German troops on this sector belonged to the 14th Panzer Corps: the 60th and 3rd Motorised Divisions faced north, and the 16th Panzer and 389th Infantry, south. They were holding the wedge they had driven into the bank of the Volga. It was no more than ten kilometres wide, but it was on high ground and we were unable to scan it in depth from our lowland positions.

Enemy aircraft dominated the air, ceaselessly bombing our troops and, especially, the city. Every sortie left Stalingrad wrapped in smoke. Evidently the Germans had set themselves the task of razing the city to the ground.

Offensive action on our side was maintained by units of the 1st Guards and 66th Armies, who were attempting to join with the 62nd Army fighting in the city itself.

At the OP I was introduced to the Deputy Front Commander, V. N. Gordov. This was our first meeting. He was

obviously keyed up and when we entered, was engaged in dressing down his army commanders over the phone, with no mincing of words (the ranks aptly called such officers "cuss commanders").

Impatiently, Zhukov intervened. "You won't set matters right by shouting and swearing," he told Gordov. "You've got to organise the battle—if you can."

Taking an unbiased view of the situation on this sector, I must say that the trouble was due not to poor command but to insufficient forces and means to carry out the task. Another contributing factor was undue haste. The Front Commander was insistently required to bring about a decisive turn in the fortunes of battle in spite of the considerable superiority enjoyed by the enemy. Once again desire bore little relation to what the troops were capable of.

By evening it became clear that the attack would again be fruitless. The troops suffered losses but were unable to breach the enemy's defences.

Suggesting that Gordov reflect on how to act further, Zhukov invited me to go with him to the Front CP. From there he was to get in touch with A. M. Vasilevsky, who was visiting the Southeastern Front.

I was surprised to hear that the Southeastern Front Command and Headquarters had transferred to the eastern bank of the Volga. In the circumstances it seemed strange indeed that the troops should be engaged in heavy fighting with an advancing enemy while the command and staff were separated from them by a wide river. I have always held that a commander must be with his troops in combat. It makes control easier and gives his men confidence. In the present instance it would have been logical to maintain an auxiliary post for control and communication with the 62nd Army which was fighting in the city.

A battle without precedent in history was developing on the bank of the great Russian river. The enemy had penetrated deep into our territory, but his plans were collapsing one after the other. Instead of weakening, the resistance of the Soviet people and its army stiffened every day. The population of the temporarily occupied areas hated the invaders. Throughout the German rear the partisan movement was gaining momentum. Grave setbacks at the front had not shaken the Soviet people's faith in the superiority of the socialist system over capitalism. The people and their Armed Forces stood for their Soviet form of government, fought

unstintingly for their country's freedom and independence, and spared no effort to achieve final victory.

After their defeat at Moscow, the nazi leaders had realised that the war would be a protracted affair. They could no longer attack on all strategic sectors as they had in 1941. The main German objective for the summer of 1942 was to destroy our forces west of the Don and subsequently to capture the Caucasian oilfields and the mountain passes over the Main Caucasian Range. The overall objective was to be ensured by gaining a firm foothold on the Volga in the Stalingrad area. This was a cunning plan and its success would have placed our country in an extremely critical situation.

I have already mentioned that by the beginning of the operation the German Command had succeeded in improving their troops' initial position and concentrating large forces on the southern wing of the Soviet-German front. At the end of June, the enemy assumed the offensive, breached our defence and struck southeast. Our troops were forced to fall back under the pressure of superior forces possessing greater mobility and enjoying superiority in the air.

The Stalingrad Front CP was located close to the Volga bank. The improvised dugouts offered no protection from either shells or rain, and muddy streams trickled down through the thin earthen roofing. The site was ill-chosen. It was in an open depression in full view of enemy aircraft and in the daytime the CP revealed its presence by the movement of men, trucks and horse carts.

Late in the evening Gordov arrived and reported to Zhukov that he had ordered the troops to assume the defensive. He blamed the failure of the offensive on shortage of artillery, mortars and munitions, and mainly on poor organisation. The haste with which it had been conceived had made it impossible to establish co-ordination, and the troops had been thrown into battle without sufficient preparation and piecemeal.

"Who is to blame for this?" Zhukov asked.

Gordov replied that he had reported that there was not enough time to prepare the operation but had been unable to gain a postponement of the offensive.

Judging by all appearances, Zhukov himself had come to the conclusion that there was nothing to be achieved by tip-and-run attacks the results of which were nil. The enemy

was sufficiently strong and capable not only of repulsing our sallies but of attacking consecutively at different points. He would go to any lengths to take the whole of Stalingrad, and the fighting there went on practically non-stop.

It was clear that success could be expected only if the offensive was thoroughly prepared and supported by all possible means available at that time. This was the essence of Gordov's suggestions.

Zhukov ordered me to assume command over the Stalingrad Front (shortly afterwards it was renamed the Don Front, the Southeastern becoming the Stalingrad Front). I told Zhukov that I fully agreed with Gordov's conclusions and requested that I be allowed to command the troops myself within the spirit of the overall task set by GHQ, adapting to the situation in hand.

"In other words," Zhukov said with a smile, "you mean there's no point in my being here? All right, I leave today."

That day Zhukov left by plane for Moscow.

I took over at once and set about getting to know the troops. At the time the newly named Don Front included General V. I. Kuznetsov's 63rd Army, which held a frontage of over 200 kilometres along the left (northern) bank of the Don with a small bridgehead on the southern bank at Verkhni Mamon; General A. I. Danilov's 21st Army with a frontage of 150 kilometres, also on the northern bank and a bridgehead on the southern bank in the area of Yelanskaya, Ust-Khoperskaya, Serafimovich; General V. D. Kryuchenkin's 4th Tank Army, which occupied a sector extending for some 30 kilometres on the northern bank and between the Don and the Volga; General I. V. Galanin's 24th Army, holding a 50-kilometre sector between the two rivers; General R. Y. Malinovsky's 66th Army holding a 20-kilometre line also between the two rivers, with its left flank on the Volga.

Thus, two armies held defences along a wide frontage drawn out along the river, while three continued to engage in fighting in the stretch between the Volga and the Don, threatening the main nazi army group that had reached the Volga from the north.

The Stalingrad (formerly Southeastern) Front under General A. I. Eremenko included General V. I. Chuikov's 62nd Army (fighting in the city and cut off on the north and south by enemy units that had reached the Volga); General M. S. Shumilov's 64th Army; General F. I. Tolbu-

khin's 57th Army; and General N. I. Trufanov's 51st Army, defending a wide front south of Lake Barmantsak.

After protracted fighting, all the units of the Don Front were severely depleted, yet we received hardly any replenishments. On orders from GHQ they were being channelled to form new units in the rear.

By the end of September, the enemy had committed all his forces to action without achieving his objective. Army Group A was engaged in heavy fighting in the Caucasian foothills, where it was bogged down by the resolute resistance of our troops. Besides, it had to assign units of the 4th Panzer Army to reinforce Army Group B, which was pinned down between the Volga and the Don by heavy fighting forced upon it by the Soviet Command. Thus the nazis had succeeded neither in taking the Caucasus nor in reaching the Volga along the whole stretch from Stalingrad to Astrakhan. As in 1941, the nazi command had underrated the Soviet Union's strength and capabilities. The time had come when the nazi command should have given the situation a sober appraisal and begun thinking how to extricate itself from a critical situation. It failed to do so, while our GHQ and the General Staff, as at the decisive moment in the Battle of Moscow, correctly assessed the possibility of dealing the enemy a crushing blow.

As I have said, units of the Don Front held two bridgeheads on the southern bank of the Don. They were our prize possessions, and the enemy repeatedly tried to dislodge us. Pitched battles also raged on the sectors held by the 24th and 66th Armies between the Don and the Volga. Whenever the enemy attempted to step up his pressure on the defenders of Stalingrad our units attacked to relieve the plight of the 62nd and 64th Armies defending the city itself. We thereby succeeded in diverting large enemy forces and compelled him to keep his main grouping on the territory between the two rivers. Fearing an attack on the rear of the troops operating against the Stalingrad Front, the nazi command concentrated the most reliable units in this area, while Rumanian units of the 6th Army Corps manned the positions to the south, on the line of the lakes.

Together with my Chief of Staff, Malinin, I plunged headlong into the work. The situation did not permit the making of any decisive changes at once, but as soon as the fighting

became protracted we began arranging things our own way. The first thing to be done was to set the troops control system in order. With a frontage of over 400 kilometres, the Front CP location only eight kilometres from the forward lines and displayed to one flank was inconvenient. We transferred it to Malaya Ivanovka, closer to the centre. Then I proceeded to inspect the troops, starting with the 63rd Army on the right flank. The understrength of the units was obvious and, whereas the special arms and services units (artillery, engineers, mortar, signals) had complements of about 50 per cent, the infantry regiments had no more than 30 or 40 per cent of their full strength. The shortage of men was catastrophic.

In spite of all they had been through, the morale of the troops was high. The line and political officers and Party and Komsomol organisations were working effectively to keep it high, citing the numerous examples of heroism displayed in the fighting for Stalingrad. The heart and soul of political work at the Front was the Military Council Member, General A. S. Zheltov, and the Chief of the Political Department, General S. F. Galadzhev, a fine, highly qualified political officer and good comrade. He was a man of ebullient disposition and enviable animal spirits, invaluable qualities, especially in times of crisis, and they far outnumbered the happy moments.

My association with General Zheltov was not a long one, as he was soon transferred to the newly formed Southwestern Front, but I retain the very best memories of him. He was easy to work with, and a real Communist and Bolshevik.

In the 4th Tank Army, I received additional testimony as to the great losses in equipment our armour had suffered through being committed to action piecemeal, without due organisation and artillery support. This Army (which admittedly had played a part in foiling the enemy's plans of encircling our 62nd and 64th Armies in the big bend of the Don) had only four tanks left. As one of the officers remarked ironically, perhaps that was why it was called the 4th Tank Army. The men called it with more bitter irony, the four-tank army. The Army Commander, General V. D. Kryuchenkin, was due for recall to Moscow. I knew him from peacetime service, when he had commanded the 14th Cavalry Division in my own 5th Cavalry Corps. He was a fine, brave soldier who had distinguished himself in

the fighting against the *basmachi* bands in Central Asia. That he had always been in the thick of the battle in those days was testified to by the countless sabre scars on his head and face.

His place was taken by General P. I. Batov, a man of great combat experience and bold initiative with whom I had seen service together on the Bryansk Front. I was confident that he would revive the Army, which soon became the 65th Field Army. It was defending a sizeable bridgehead on the western bank of the Don, an extremely important position which had to be held at all costs. Our troops used it to attack the enemy whenever he launched an assault on the city, thus assisting the Stalingrad Front's 62nd and 64th Armies.

The 24th Army, over which General I. V. Galanin had assumed command, was positioned with its right flank abutting on the Don. Like the 65th Army, it engaged in offensive operations, diverting crack German units. On visiting it, I saw that with the forces and means at his disposal Galanin could hardly count on achieving any tangible success. The enemy was strong, manoeuvrable and occupied an advantageous line, previously organised by our troops. The Army's units were greatly depleted as a result of long and fierce fighting, but despite fatigue, losses and the absence of appreciable success, the men and commanders were in high spirits, inspired by the realisation that any action they undertook would help their comrades fighting in Stalingrad.

At last I got to the 66th Army, deployed like the 24th between the Don and the Volga, its left flank abutting on the Volga and poised over Stalingrad in the north. The Army's advantageous position meant that it had to engage in almost continuous action aimed at breaking through the corridor separating the Stalingrad Front's 62nd Army from our troops. With the forces and means at its disposal the 66th Army could never hope to carry out this task. The enemy, who had reached the Volga here, occupied the so-called Stalingrad Defence Ring originally built by our troops. The enemy had sufficient forces to hold his positions, but the Army's actions nevertheless eased the plight of the city's defenders by diverting his attention and efforts. Opposite the 66th Army stood the 14th Panzer Corps.

When I arrived at the 66th Army CP, the Army Commander was not there. He had gone to the troops, General

F. K. Korzhenevich, Army Chief of Staff, reported. I knew Korzhenevich from the time we had served together in the 3rd Cavalry Corps in 1930, where I commanded the 7th Samara Cavalry Division and he was Corps Chief of Operations. He was a highly educated staff officer. I was somewhat surprised that the Army Commander had chosen to go visiting the troops when he knew that I was due to arrive. Korzhenevich offered to call him to the CP, but I said I would find him myself and take the opportunity of seeing the Army in its positions.

I visited the divisional and regimental command posts, worked my way down to the battalion CP, but still could not locate the Army Commander. He was with one of the companies, they told me.

That day plenty of artillery and mortar fire was being exchanged. To all appearances the enemy was preparing a sally to repay the attack carried out by the Army on the previous day. I decided to visit the company out of sheer curiosity and see what the Army Commander was doing. Now walking full height along communication passages, now half crawling along crumbling trenches, I finally reached the frontline. There I saw a short, stocky general. After the official preliminaries and a brief chat, I hinted to the Army Commander that it hardly made sense for him to crawl about a company's positions and suggested that he might choose a more favourable place from which to control his troops. Rodion Malinovsky listened attentively. His sullen face warmed.

"I know it myself," he said with a smile. "But it's pretty rough having the big chiefs on your tail all the time. So I came out here to keep out of reach."

We parted the best of friends, having reached complete understanding. There could be no doubt that the Army's task was far beyond its possibilities. Its commander fully realised this, but promised to do all he could to step up activity against the enemy.

Some sectors of our defence offered an excellent view of the enemy positions. After the fierce fighting they were littered with gutted tanks—Soviet and German. The men called these positions tank fields, and they were hard nuts to crack. The nazis had dug trenches under the gutted tanks, turning them into formidable gun emplacements whose capture cost us dear.

While I was inspecting the troops, new commanders con-

tinued to arrive at Front HQ, among them General Kazakov, appointed Chief of Artillery, General Oryol, Chief of Armour, and General Maksimenko, Chief of Communications, with whom I had gone through the grim days at Moscow and served on the Bryansk Front. Their appointment to the Don Front was timely as, judging by everything, serious events were brewing.

The troops of the Front were firmly entrenched and engaged in active defence, striking now at one sector, now at another, keeping the enemy in a state of tension and denying him the possibility of regrouping his forces. These activities stemmed from GHQ's basic directive, which required us to hold the line along the river Don and all the bridgeheads on the southern bank and assist the Stalingrad Front in holding Stalingrad by counterblows in the country between the Don and the Volga. Fighting in the city continued without respite, the 62nd Army repelling one attack after another, fighting literally for every building.

Stalingrad was coming to resemble the "Verdun mill" of the First World War. The enemy, bent on seizing the ruins of the city at all costs, threw in more and more fresh troops, heedless of losses.

The Stalingrad Front Command did all it could to reinforce the 62nd Army. GHQ rushed infantry, armoured and artillery units to Stalingrad, most of which were immediately ferried across the Volga into the city. A trickle reached the Don Front, but this was too little to make good the losses we suffered in our counterattacks.

In the city, the enemy had reached the river already at three points. In view of the critical position of the 62nd Army, GHQ ordered an offensive operation in October involving elements of two fronts. Our Don Front had the objective of harassing the enemy from the Don bridgeheads, so as to prevent him from transferring reinforcements to Stalingrad. At the same time the left flank of our 24th Army, in co-operation with the 66th, was to rout the enemy units north of the city and join with the 62nd in Stalingrad. We were given permission to use seven infantry divisions from the GHQ Reserve for the operation, but received no additional supporting means in the shape of artillery, armour or aircraft. The chances of success were remote, especially as the enemy had well fortified positions.

Since the main objective in the operation fell to the 66th Army, I had a conversation with Malinovsky, who begged

me not to commit the seven new divisions to action. "We'll only waste them," he said.

Happily, only two of the seven promised divisions arrived by the deadline set by GHQ, and were duly handed over to the 66th Army. The others were late, and we relegated them to the Front reserve. Subsequently they played an important part in the fighting.

As expected, the attack failed. The armies of the Don Front were unable to penetrate the enemy's defences, and the offensive undertaken by the Stalingrad Front also fell short of its objectives. Still, the enemy was compelled to maintain his group in the area between the rivers, and this greatly influenced the subsequent course of events at Stalingrad.

Meanwhile the enemy was forced to mark time, incapable of advancing either on the Volga or in the Caucasus. His tremendously extended communications gave him much trouble, and sabotage by partisans had increased.

Taking advantage of the situation, the Soviet Command began mounting a powerful counteroffensive. It was to start, as we guessed easily enough, simultaneously on the northern and southern flanks. To carry out this plan, the main German group between the Volga and the Don had to be pinned down. This was achieved by stepping up the activity of units of the Don and the Stalingrad Fronts, while the troops designated for the counterblow regrouped and concentrated.

One could sense that the enemy had exhausted his offensive possibilities. The flanks of his main group between the two rivers and at Stalingrad were poorly protected, and he did not have enough reserves to organise adequate defences in the occupied area. His communications were vulnerable over a vast territory.

The long-awaited moment was approaching. Zhukov told Eremenko and myself of the forthcoming counteroffensive as early as October. He did not give us even an approximate date, but the knowledge enabled us to proceed, in utmost secrecy, with the preparation of certain measures. Much was done to mislead the enemy. To convince him that our intention was to attack in the sector between the Don and the Volga we were especially active there and simulated intensive fortification work, digging of trenches, and so on, in other sectors. All troop movements into the areas from

which they were to attack were carried out by night, with due camouflage precautions.

Besides its permanent task of providing support over the battlefield, the 16th Air Army, under the experienced and energetic General S. I. Rudenko, was ordered to keep constant watch over the enemy. It was essential to know of any regrouping he might undertake within the Front area and on the boundaries with the neighbours.

As luck would have it, just at this time, when so much was required of the airmen there was an outbreak of tularemia in the air force. The disease was spread by mice, which had multiplied tremendously, and special measures had to be taken, not only to protect people from contracting the disease, but also to save aircraft from being damaged by the rodents, which gnawed rubber insulation wherever they could get at it.

The plan of the offensive involved the armies of three fronts. The Stalingrad Front was to strike with its left flank from the neighbourhood of the Sarpa lakes. The Don Front was to pin down as many enemy troops as possible in the Volga-Don country and at the same time strike on its right flank in close co-operation with its neighbour on the right, the newly organised Southwestern Front, which was to deal the main blow from the bridgeheads on the southern bank of the Don. The idea thus was to deal two powerful blows at the flanks of the enemy's Stalingrad group and surround it.

The General Staff and GHQ must be given the credit for their excellent timing. We were in a position to create a superiority in manpower and materiel on the main lines of attack. The essential thing was to prevent the enemy from organising the defence and withdrawing troops from the Volga-Don area for building up reserves.

We all realised that there was no time to waste. The General Staff realised this, too, and preparations for the operation went ahead swiftly. In November enemy activity at the front decreased appreciably. Only small groups were active in the city and one could see he was attempting to assume the defensive between the Volga and the Don.

Considerable changes had taken place on our right wing, where we had handed over the 63rd and 21st Armies to the newly created Southwestern Front. Our only consolation was that we had begun to receive some replenishments, though not nearly enough. We experienced a terrible shortage of

manpower. As always in such cases, we scoured our rear echelons, medical battalions and hospitals. The Front HQ and Political Department searched the Front as a whole for men, the army commands, their own units. With great difficulty we managed to scrape together some men, whom we assigned to the units that were to bear the brunt of the fighting in the initial stages of the offensive.

On strict instructions from Zhukov, then representing GHQ, only a small group of staff workers was told of the impending offensive. All our preparations were made to look like attempts to strengthen the defences.

On November 3, I was invited with a group of staff officers to attend a conference in the zone of the 21st Army, now under the Southwestern Front. The meeting, presided over by Zhukov, was attended by all army commanders and the commanders of the divisions assigned to the main effort. Special attention was given to co-ordination between neighbours at Front boundaries.

Later we heard that a similar meeting was held on the Stalingrad Front as well.

A truly creative atmosphere reigned at the conference, the tasks set before the commanders were bold and interesting. General Zhukov displayed great erudition and a broad knowledge of the situation.

While the plans were being drawn up, the logistical support was built up for the offensive. Trainloads of tanks, artillery and munitions began arriving at the three fronts concerned. True, the flow was little more than a trickle compared with what we needed, but the country was sparing no effort to give its army all possible help. We soldiers fully realised this and did our best to justify the nation's hopes in the forthcoming battles. The line and political officers channelled the troops' enthusiasm in the right direction: to improve combat training standards and boost morale for the coming offensive.

Together with the Army Commanders, Batov, Galanin, Zhadov (who replaced Malinovsky, recalled by GHQ), Rudenko, and the arms chiefs, I worked out the details of the campaign. GHQ sent us further details of our missions.

The Southwestern Front was to deliver the main attack from the bridgehead southwest of Serafimovich against the 3rd Rumanian Army. Pressing home the offensive in the general direction of Kalach, on the third day it was to join with troops of the Stalingrad Front (attacking towards it),

push its right wing southwest to the rivers Krivaya and Chir and set up an active outer ring of encirclement.

The Stalingrad Front, advancing from the Sarpa lakes area, was to rout the 6th Rumanian Army Corps, fight its way northwest in the direction of Sovetsky, join with troops of the Southwestern Front and, in co-operation with units of the Don Front, destroy the surrounded enemy. The Stalingrad Front would support its strike force by attacking with part of its forces in the direction of Abganerovo, Kotelnikovo, also making up part of the exterior front of investment.

The Don Front was to advance from the bridgehead at Kletskaya and the neighbourhood of Kachalinskaya, rout the opposing German troops, advance in the general direction of Vertyachi and, in co-operation with the Southwestern Front, surround and destroy the enemy in the small bend of the Don. After that it would proceed, together with troops of the Stalingrad Front, to wipe out the main enemy grouping surrounded at Stalingrad. By that time the 21st Army would be returned to us from the Southwestern Front.

At first it was planned that the Southwestern and Don Fronts would assume the offensive on November 9, and the Stalingrad Front on the 10th, but owing to a hitch in the concentration of forces and equipment the date was shifted to November 19 for the Southwestern and Don Fronts, and the 20th for the Stalingrad Front.

Although the situation compelled haste, GHQ acted wisely in heeding the requests of the Front Commanders. The troops were able to prepare well and commence the offensive in an organised fashion. This to a large degree predetermined the success of the operation.

By the commencement of operations the Don Front had received from GHQ Reserve three infantry divisions with a 60 per cent complement, and the 16th Air Army had received a second bomber corps. We were not surprised by the poor infantry reinforcements, for we realised that fresh troops were primarily required where the fate of the operation was to be decided. And as the Southwestern Front was to play the main part in surrounding the enemy, it received not only infantry but also large quantities of mobile troops.

The Stalingrad Front was also considerably reinforced, as its task was to penetrate the defence and, advancing rapidly towards the Southwestern Front, close the pincers around the enemy grouping.

On the basis of the GHQ directives and with due consideration of the situation at the Front, a decision was taken on how the operation was to be conducted and the armies of the Front were assigned their various tasks. In the course of protracted fighting along the Don and in the country up to the Volga, the staffs had had ample opportunity to study both the enemy and the terrain. This considerably facilitated assignment of the armies' missions and gave them more time to organise. One of our main concerns was to have everything organised to perfection so that higher staffs would not waste time on paperwork to the detriment of the preparation of the troops, who often were given barely enough time to carry out orders.

A special task was assigned to the 65th Army, which was to take part in the main attack together with the 21st, its neighbour on the right. Their common objective was to breach the front, wipe out the opposing enemy units, envelope the enemy flank, penetrate into his rear on the line of the River Don and advance southeast in the direction of Vertyachi. There was a difference, though, in that the 21st had Rumanian troops opposite it, and the 65th, German. With this in mind we did our best to reinforce Batov's troops, even at the cost of weakening the other armies.

A very difficult task was assigned to the 24th Army, which was to advance with its right flank abutting on the Don, breach the enemy's defences and move towards Vertyachi, preventing the enemy troops operating against the 65th and 21st from crossing to the eastern bank. I must say that, given the means we could provide, this was an obviously impossible task. However, we counted on the 24th's offensive operations pinning down considerable enemy forces and preventing him from reinforcing the main attack sector, where the encirclement was to be carried out.

Evidently GHQ also took this into account when it instructed the Front to use Galanin's army in this way.

Since the 66th had received no additional supporting means, it was ordered only to pin down the enemy units opposing it. The Army was used to such tasks—not at all easy ones—and, to tell the truth, unrewarding. But in war recourse must also frequently be had to such action. The unfortunate commanders often devote more energy to their tasks than those who are advancing on the line of the main effort, and without any promise of distinction. It is a pity that the higher command often fails to take account of such

circumstances. All this may seem to belong rather to the realm of psychology than warfare, but a military leader must also be a good psychologist capable of understanding a soldier's emotions. A fair appreciation of the actions of every commander and his subordinates, with due account of all the difficulties they had to face, inspires men and increases their faith in their own strength.

THE PINCERS CLOSE

Although it was given very little time to prepare for the offensive, the Don Front managed to regroup and occupy the line of departure. The staff workers and arms and services commanders in both the Front and Army echelons worked day and night to meet the deadline.

Together with Military Council Member, K. F. Telegin (just appointed to replace A. S. Zheltov, who had been transferred to the Southwestern Front), and Generals Kazakov, Oryol and Rudenko, I went to our auxiliary command post in the 65th Army sector to observe the artillery preparation.

The weather forecast had been favourable, but before dawn it became apparent that the weather men had been mistaken. There was a thick fog and nothing suggested that it would rise soon.

Meanwhile zero-hour for the artillery preparation was rapidly approaching. We discussed alterations in the plan necessitated by the change in weather and I issued the relevant orders. At the scheduled time the artillery and rocket launchers opened fire. The rumble of guns on the right told us that our neighbour, the Southwestern Front, had also begun its offensive.

Thus, on November 19, 1942, began the historic battle that culminated in the encirclement of the crack German armies.

Up to this moment the enemy could still have spared his troops the ignominy of defeat by withdrawing them westward; now nothing could save them from the fate to which the nazi generals' overconfidence had condemned them. The plan ably and thoroughly drawn up by the Soviet Command was put into action.

Air Force General S. I. Rudenko was extremely put out. The massive air strikes provided for by the plan were ruled out by the bad weather. I allowed him to use his aircraft in pairs or singly and these surprise attacks proved a boon to

our infantry. Flying in the mist required great skill and courage on the part of the airmen, but they performed their task well, thereby increasing the esteem in which the ground forces held them.

Enemy aircraft hardly appeared that day, but our planes stepped up their activity as the weather began to clear. The battlefield was obscured in dense mist and optical instruments were of no avail. All we could see were the flashes of explosions lighting up the milky shroud. The guns rumbled ceaselessly.

Soon, however, the rumble changed its tone indicating that the fire had been shifted to the depth of the enemy defences. A mighty "Hurrah" mingled with the grinding roar of the tanks. The assault had begun. We exchanged glances. Would we succeed in penetrating the enemy's fortifications?

We strained our ears. Enemy gun and mortar fire showed no sign of increasing and continued only sporadically, but automatic fire began to crackle all along the front. Evidently our artillery preparation had not succeeded in suppressing all enemy positions. Now occasional artillery shots could be heard through the fog. This, we guessed, would be our guns opening up with direct fire to silence enemy gun emplacements, a method widely practised in the 65th Army. General V. I. Kazakov, the Front Chief of Artillery, and the 65th Army Chief of Artillery, S. I. Beskin, were great exponents of direct fire and advocated it insistently.

Soon the enemy fire died down perceptibly and the sounds of battle receded into the distance.

Gradually the mist cleared and the battlefield came into sight. Through field-glasses I watched our troops storm the precipitous chalk hills in the Kletskaya area. I could see the men clinging to ledges and climbing stubbornly. Many lost their hold and slid down, only to get up and start climbing again, helping each other up the steep slopes and rushing the enemy positions. The nazis resisted desperately, but our infantry overcame them and drove them off the heights. The enemy's main line of defence began to show signs of cracking. The 65th Army kept pounding it steadily and pushing forward—with difficulty on the left flank, more successfully at the boundary with the 21st Army, on the right.

In the second half of the day the enemy attempted to halt our advance with counterattacks. General I. M. Chistyakov, Commander of the 21st Army, threw in a tank

corps, which broke through and proceeded to exploit the success.

P. I. Batov, 65th Army Commander, displayed fine initiative with an improvised mobile task force. Assembling all the tanks he could, he mounted an infantry landing party on them and dispatched them to bypass enemy strong points. By striking at the enemy flank and rear, the task force ensured the swift advance of the other units.

Our efforts, coupled with those of the Commander of the Southwestern Front, who committed a tank army and other mobile units to action, culminated in the penetration of the enemy front on the main line of advance. Our troops poured into the breach, hastening towards the units of the Stalingrad Front that were coming up from the south.

All enemy attempts to halt our advance failed. The small batches of armour and motorised units, rushed to the breach from the neighbourhood of Stalingrad, were overrun by our superior forces.

On the other hand, the 24th Army's offensive designed to prevent a retreat to the eastern bank of the Don by enemy units under attack from the 65th and 21st Armies was unsuccessful. Here the nazis held a well-organised line of defence and repulsed all attacks. Now we regretted that the forces and means used to reinforce the 24th Army had not been transferred to the troops that were successfully advancing.

The 24th Army did, of course, contribute to the general operation to some extent by pinning down considerable enemy forces. Nor can the Army Commander, Galanin, be blamed entirely for the failure. No doubt he made some errors of judgment, but the fact of the matter is that the Army simply lacked the strength to overcome so strong a defence.

On November 23, the troops of the Southwestern and Stalingrad Fronts, having routed the enemy on the enveloping flanks of their strike forces, met in the Sovetsky-Kalach area, thus completing the encirclement of the enemy's Stalingrad army group. The main forces of the Southwestern Front (minus the 21st Army, which was returned to the Don Front) continued to advance southwest and west, setting up the exterior front of investment. The Stalingrad Front, leaving three armies to hold and destroy the surrounded enemy, continued to advance southwest with the rest of its forces, throwing the exterior front as far back

from the pocket as possible. The task of mopping up the units of the German 6th and 4th Panzer Armies encircled in the Stalingrad area was assigned by GHQ to troops of the Don and Stalingrad Fronts, which proceeded to carry it out without halting the offensive for one moment.

On the west and north the ring was being drawn tighter by our 21st, 65th, 24th and 66th Armies; on the south and east by the 57th, 64th and 62nd Armies of the Stalingrad Front. Understandably enough, GHQ kept demanding that we finish the mopping-up operations as quickly as possible, as this would free the massive forces required by the present strategic situation. These troops could then be directed to the rear of the enemy Army Group A to lock it up in the Northern Caucasus, that is, to repeat the manoeuvre so effectively carried out at Stalingrad.

Realising the importance of the task, we did all we could to carry it out as speedily as possible. The Military Council Members and all senior commanders and political officers were constantly with the troops. Many took part in assaults personally, though such bravado could not be wholly encouraged as, besides leading to unjustified losses of life, it could also weaken the troop leadership.

Several days of intense fighting revealed that the surrounded enemy could not be wiped out at a blow. Wishful thinking was not enough to achieve this objective and it would take the thorough preparation of a new operation, with detailed co-ordination between the fronts. The best thing, of course, would have been to place the leadership of the operation in the hands of one man.

Time passed, yet the results of the attacks against the surrounded group were not at all encouraging. The 21st Army, having crossed the Don, pushed back the enemy forces east of the river and became involved in heavy fighting. The 65th Army encountered a powerful defence line and ground to a halt.

The 24th Army was unable to breach the enemy defences, but its attacks forced the enemy to withdraw several divisions from Stalingrad. This contributed to the success of the 66th Army, which made a considerable advance southward towards Stalingrad along the bank of the Volga.

When troops of the 65th Army crossed the Don, the 24th was also able to advance. Both armies joined flanks and deployed their front eastward, but they were unable to overcome the well-organised enemy defences.

Likewise, the 66th Army, after its initial successful advance, was halted by the enemy at the line of our former fortified middle ring.

As mentioned before, on GHQ's orders the 24th Army was to have attacked and surrounded the enemy group beyond the Don. If the manoeuvre had been successful the result would have been a kind of double sandwich: an encirclement within an encirclement. In addition to the main pocket we would have had to encircle the enemy's Don group, an operation which would have required practically all our troops. The 24th and 21st Armies would have been compelled simultaneously to engage the enemy's Don group to the east, and his Stalingrad group to the west, fighting inside a narrow corridor. The plan, however, had failed to materialise.

As a result of our troops' advance the area occupied by the surrounded enemy group had shrunk to little more than half its original size and by the end of November covered less than 1,500 square kilometres. At some sections the enemy had been forced back, on others he had withdrawn of his own accord to more favourable positions. The nazis made wide use of the fortification system we had built back in summer, before the fighting for Stalingrad had begun. The shortening of the defence frontage enabled the enemy to consolidate his battle formations considerably, while the abundance of fortifications of all types on the line to which he had retreated enabled him quickly to organise a powerful defence. The enemy also exploited the possibility of manoeuvring reserves swiftly within the ring, and rushing them to any threatened point. Our troops, sadly depleted in the offensive, could not break his resistance without some pause for regrouping.

Some successes were scored between November 28 and 30 by troops of the 21st and 65th Armies, which carried Peskovatka and Vertyachi, but on other sectors neither we nor our neighbour achieved any results. After visiting several sectors I saw that without special, serious preparation we could hardly count on success in an offensive. I reported this to Stalin over the telephone. I also mentioned that it would be more opportune to entrust the mopping up of the surrounded enemy force to one Front, the Stalingrad or the Don, subordinating to it all the troops operating in the area.

Stalin gave no definite reply. At the time GHQ's main concern was the exterior front of investment, to which all

available forces from the reserves, and even units fighting the surrounded enemy, were directed. Thus, three infantry divisions and four antitank regiments were taken from our Front, and almost all the armour and motorised units were taken from the Stalingrad Front. This further weakened the already understrength units engaged in continuous fighting at Stalingrad. Still, in the circumstances the decision was a correct one.

By the beginning of December the exterior front of investment was 40 to 100 kilometres from the surrounded enemy force. This greatly facilitated the mopping-up operations inside the pocket, but we lacked the strength to speed up the operation.

On Stalin's insistent orders, conveyed to us by the Chief of the General Staff, A. M. Vasilevsky, who had arrived for a tour of inspection, in the beginning of December we resumed the offensive. We dug deep into our by then considerably depleted stocks. The men plunged into the battle and fought heroically, but the enemy was still very strong, occupied advantageous, well-equipped defences and was not going to be easily dislodged.

All of our command personnel, from Front to platoon commander, were with the troops, studying the enemy's defence system and manner of fighting. Any useful initiative contributing to success in combat was encouraged and supported in all ways.

It was noticed that the enemy exploited our lengthy artillery preparations to bring up reserves to the place of the expected strike and then repel our offensive with fire and counterattacks. Many suggestions were made on how to outwit the enemy. Thus, we struck on a method of consecutive capture of separate objectives. Well-prepared units reinforced with artillery and tanks were assigned for this. They struck suddenly, without any artillery preparation, sometimes in daytime, sometimes at night. The assault began simultaneously with the opening up of artillery fire against the attacked target. As soon as the infantry and tanks broke into the forward enemy trenches the artillery fire was shifted to the depth and flanks. Infantry units blocked gun emplacements, destroyed them and exploited the success in depth. Other methods were also employed.

Though we were unable to rout the enemy at the time, the activity of our troops and those of the Stalingrad Front inflicted great losses in effectives and materiel, forcing him

to use up his dwindling stocks of ammunition. The enemy was pushed back another 20 to 30 kilometres from the Don towards the Volga and the ring squeezed tighter.

Still, the pocket had a perimeter of 170 kilometres, and a tough barrier had to be thrown up to prevent enemy troops and armour from breaking out. The terrain was undulating steppe crisscrossed with numerous gullies with steep, precipitous sides, which the enemy used as shelter for headquarters and depots and for concentrating tactical reserves.

In the southeastern part of the broad valley through which the Rossoshka river flows there were many flat stretches of ground suitable for landing aircraft (the surrounded troops, naturally, relied on air for all supplies). There were also many villages along the Rossoshka, and the enemy turned them into centres of resistance. Add to this the snow that blanketed the defence works, providing excellent camouflage.

In short, advancing over such terrain was a hard job. The numerous hummocks and steep-sided gullies, extending mainly from west to east, impeded our troops' manoeuvrability. The lack of cover and reliable water supply within our dispositions further complicated the situation.

The winter was a harsh one. Strong winds with blizzards and frosts down to 32° C greatly impeded the offensive.

My repeated reports to GHQ on the impossibility of carrying out our task without time for regrouping and without reinforcing the Front with both manpower and materiel finally had their effect, and GHQ decided to reinforce the Don Front with the 2nd Guards Army—fully manned, plus a mechanised corps including armour and other means. This was a great force and, for us, a great event. Our spirits soared. Now we were confident that the trapped enemy force would be rapidly annihilated. This would release the seven armies engaged at Stalingrad and we would also gain the large Stalingrad railway junction, which would tremendously facilitate the operations of the Southwestern and Voronezh Fronts on the Rostov sector.

We began preparing for the offensive without awaiting the arrival of the 2nd Guards Army. A. M. Vasilevsky, who was with us as GHQ representative in charge of co-ordinating the actions of the two fronts, took an active part in drawing up the operations plan.

All the leading Front and Army command personnel, generals and officers with experience and knowledge, were drawn into the work. Front Military Council Member, K. F. Telegin, Chief of Staff, M. S. Malinin, Chief of Operations, I. I. Boikov, Chief of Intelligence, I. V. Vinogradov, Chief of the Political Department, S. F. Galadzhev, my deputy, K. P. Trubnikov, Chief of Artillery, V. I. Kazakov, Armour and Mechanised Troops Commander, G. N. Oryol, Chief of Engineers, A. I. Proshlyakov, Chief of Communications, P. Y. Maksimenko—all took part in this important work.

The basic idea of the operation was to split up the surrounded group by striking at the centre from two sides and then to mop up the resulting pockets. The Don Front was to deliver the main attack from west to east; the Stalingrad Front, striking from southeast to west, would advance to meet it.

Running ahead, I must say that this conception dominated the operation from the beginning to the end. The means we employed did vary, depending on the situation and available forces, but the plan of first cutting the encircled group in two, with the main effort directed at its centre from west to east, was carried out to perfection. I stress this point, as some materials published since the war give an incorrect interpretation of this question.

According to the plan, General R. Y. Malinovsky's 2nd Guards Army was to strike on a limited sector at the centre of the Front; to the right General I. M. Chistyakov's 21st Army was to concentrate its main forces on its left flank; on the left, General P. I. Batov's 65th Army was to concentrate its main forces on its right flank adjoining the 2nd Guards Army. Thus, on the main line of advance we had three armies reinforced with artillery, tanks and self-propelled guns. General S. I. Rudenko's 16th Air Army was also to be committed fully to the main line of advance.

The other armies of the Don Front—General Galanin's 24th and General Zhadov's 66th—were assigned missions of harassing the enemy on their sectors, so as to keep him from withdrawing units to reinforce the troops receiving the main attack.

The Stalingrad Front was to strike towards us with the troops of the 57th and 64th Armies, while General Chuikov's 62nd Army stepped up activities in Stalingrad to pin down the enemy forces there.

This plan, drawn up with the active participation of Colonel-General A. M. Vasilevsky, was reported to GHQ on December 9 and duly endorsed.

While the units of the 2nd Guards Army were moving out to take up their assigned positions, General Malinovsky with his staff officers arrived at my HQ Zavorykino. This was standard procedure in the Red Army. While the troops were still moving up to their deployment zones the command proceeded ahead to clarify the situation on the spot and receive the assignment, thus accelerating preparations for the operation.

Even before Malinovsky could be briefed, however, events at the front forced us to put off the offensive.

With the purpose of rescuing the troops surrounded at Stalingrad, the nazi command decided to counterattack from outside on the Kotelnikovo sector. Reports began reaching us that an enemy force was also concentrating in the neighbourhood of Tormosin.

In the morning of December 12, fighting began on the Kotelnikovo sector. The enemy forced a slight withdrawal by units of General N. I. Trufanov's 51st Army operating on the exterior front of investment, whereupon General A. I. Eremenko, Commander of the Stalingrad Front, fearing that the enemy might break through to the surrounded troops, asked GHQ to transfer the 2nd Guards Army for use against von Manstein's counterattacking army group.

Vasilevsky' discussed this with Stalin over the telephone in my presence. Handing me the receiver, he said that the question was of rerouting the 2nd Guards Army to the Stalingrad Front at once. Stalin asked me what I thought of the suggestion. I said that I was against it. Stalin then continued to discuss the issue with Vasilevsky, who insisted on the need to transfer Malinovsky's army to the Stalingrad Front as Eremenko doubted his ability to repel the enemy's offensive with the forces at his disposal. Stalin then said to me that he accepted Vasilevsky's view that my proposal first of finishing off the surrounded enemy group with the help of the 2nd Guards Army, though bold and deserving of attention, was, in the circumstances, too risky; therefore I was to reroute Malinovsky's army forthwith to Kotelnikovo, to be placed at Eremenko's disposal.

When I declared that without Malinovsky's army the Don

Front would be unable to mop up the surrounded enemy, Stalin agreed to suspend the operation temporarily, promising to reinforce the Front with additional manpower and materiel. He added that he would send General N. N. Voronov, Red Army Artillery Chief, to help us with artillery and ammunition supplies.

Thus we reverted to our former status, but with our ranks depleted more than ever.

Soon after this conversation GHQ orders arrived placing all troops at Stalingrad under the Don Front. This was a timely measure, and we immediately proceeded to establish liaison and communications with the 57th, 64th and 62nd Armies. Actually, we had been in contact with them for some time already. The Front HQ had looked into the question of bringing the forces of both fronts together and we had done something towards this. In fact, Vasilevsky had remarked to me on one occasion that General Eremenko, the Stalingrad Front Commander, was complaining that Rokossovsky's staff officers were infiltrating his troops and trying to establish contact with them; Eremenko was greatly annoyed by this. Our foresight, however, had been justified, and now it was much simpler for us to establish liaison and communications with the armies handed over to us.

I made a tour of inspection to meet my new associates and see their troops and the positions they occupied. I began with the 57th Army, where I arrived together with the Member of the Military Council, General K. F. Telegin.

The 57th Army occupied a frontage of 25 kilometres along the River Chervlenaya on the southwestern arc of the encircling ring. Its commander, General F. I. Tolbukhin, impressed me favourably as a man who knew his job and could lead his troops with confidence in any situation. His Command Post was located in a village where conditions were fairly comfortable. The mood in the Army was buoyant and morale was high despite an acute shortage of manpower after the heavy fighting.

Tolbukhin jokingly remarked that he had done too good a job in supervising the fortifications construction at Stalingrad. He had hardly expected to have to battle through them himself. They certainly were a thorough job, and the enemy had done much to make them even stronger. Now Tolbukhin had a formidable task on his hands, and his forces were strained. . . .

We went on to the 64th Army, which occupied a 30-km stretch on the southern arc of the encircling forces facing north. Its right flank abutted on the Volga south of Stalingrad, its left, on the River Chervlenaya. The Army Commander, General M. S. Shumilov, was an old and seasoned soldier with a fine store of military knowledge and a wealth of practical experience as a troop commander. Externally he seemed a phlegmatic, easy-going man, but, as he later demonstrated, when the situation called for it he could be very energetic and resolute, and his troops showed that they could deal the enemy telling blows both in the defence and in the offensive. Now they were digging in at the line they had reached and constantly harassing the enemy on various sectors. The troops occupied trenches and dugouts in the open steppe, making extensive use of ravines and gullies. The Army Military Council was housed in a well-equipped dugout with several rooms, carpet runners on the floors and rugs on the walls. A hearty dinner which we were invited to share convinced us that here were thrifty and industrious quartermasters capable of creating the best possible living conditions in the circumstances. Everywhere among the troops one readily felt solicitous concern for the men's welfare. The protracted intense fighting had certainly taken its toll of men and materiel, but the fighting spirit was high and officers and men alike had full confidence in themselves.

The 62nd Army could be reached only by a circuitous route taking us first to the eastern bank of the Volga and then back to the western bank into Stalingrad proper. Although the river was not yet frozen completely and there were large pools of clear water, we crossed it on foot at Dubovka, where cars awaited us to take us to the place from which we were to cross back to the right bank occupied by the 62nd Army. Our guide briefed us on the crossing procedure and, following his directions, we took boards and ropes to negotiate sections of the ice torn up by mines and shells. Our group consisted of myself, Telegin, several officers, the guide and two sappers. Naturally, the enemy spotted us at once and accompanied us all the way with a hail of artillery and mortar fire. Dodging in and out of shell bursts, now spurting forward, now doubling back to skirt obstacles, we finally reached the other bank without mishap, where we

were greeted by the Army Commander, V. I. Chuikov, Military Council Member, K. A. Gurov and Chief of Staff, N. I. Krylov.

Following a brief introduction, we made our way to the Military Council dugout at the Command Post. Conditions here were very different from those at the 64th Army's CP. Here was the harsh austerity of a fighting position.

The Army CP was located on the river bank, its shelters dug into the precipitous sandy bluff. The walls and ceiling of the dugout were faced with boards and plywood, but sand trickled out of numerous cracks. There were, of course, no rugs or runners and the furnishing was Spartan in the extreme. When a CP is only a few hundred metres from the forward line one can hardly think of carpets or upholstered furniture. Bombs and mortar and artillery shells shook the earth, and the sand trickling out of cracks ran down our necks.

The Army occupied a narrow strip of land along the riverfront and the section of the city adjoining the river, of which nothing remained but piles of rubble with occasional skeletons of buildings. These ruins had been turned into an impenetrable fortress where the men of the 62nd had staunchly beaten back the enemy's frenzied attacks. Although the enemy had succeeded in reaching the Volga in three places and splitting up the 62nd Army, he had failed to take the whole city, and by the time of our arrival had assumed the defensive. True, fighting continued, but it was for possession of isolated objectives needed to consolidate positions or for reconnaissance purposes.

The fighting in the city was in a class by itself and required great courage, stamina, enterprise and initiative on the part of both men and commanders, and, above all, a firm feeling of comradeship, up to and including self-sacrifice. Suvorov's behest, "Die, if need be, but rescue your comrade", was a law here. The troops of this gallant Army displayed the best qualities of the Soviet soldier. Thanks to this and nothing else, they had succeeded in holding the thin strip of land along the Volga until the decisive moment, which had now come. In spite of all hardships, the troops' morale was high. Everyone was looking forward to the beginning of the final round-up and was prepared for it.

This was my first meeting with General Vasily Chuikov, and he at once aroused my deepest respect. From the days of my youth I have always admired upright, bold, resolute

and straightforward men. This was my first impression of Chuikov. He was somewhat brusque, but in war, and especially in the circumstances he had had to endure, it was perhaps only natural. It took a man like him to withstand the enemy's fiercest attack and hold on to this strip of land. The courage and selflessness of their commander was a living example to the men under him, and in many respects this contributed to the staunchness displayed by all the Army's troops defending the city.

I was deeply impressed, and from the day we met we became friends.

We returned by the same route we had used to reach Stalingrad. On the right bank of the Volga, we dropped in to A. S. Zhadov's 66th Army on the way to the Front CP. The continuous offensive operations had taken a great toll of the troops. Understrength in units ran as high as 60 to 70 per cent, especially in the infantry. Heavy fighting was in the offing and urgent measures had to be taken to furnish at least some replacements.

We inspected the line the enemy had held before withdrawing in the direction of the city, and we could see for ourselves how powerful his positions had been. A vast area in front of the defence line was dotted with damaged and gutted tanks: the dismal result of the hastily conceived, haphazard counterattacks into which our troops had been thrown at the time when the Germans were approaching the Volga. No, we would make no such attack. We would prepare the offensive thoroughly.

FINALE AT STALINGRAD

With the transfer of the 2nd Guards Army to the Stalingrad Front we had to make some substantial adjustments in the plan of the operation. The objective was still to slice the enemy grouping in half. Only now it was to be achieved, not by two, but by one main thrust from west to east. The plan was finalised with the active participation of N. N. Voronov, who had come to Zavorykino on December 19.

On December 27 the plan was submitted to GHQ.

The Don Front had to mop up twenty-two enemy divisions with a numerical strength, by the end of December, of around 250,000 effectives. The main line of defence was held by fifteen infantry, three motorised and one panzer division; two panzer and one cavalry divisions were in the reserve. The enemy also had 149 separate units of various kinds, which were used to replenish the infantry divisions holding the main line and reinforce reserve units.

The reserves were deployed so as to form a second ring inside the pocket, thus increasing the depth of the defence and creating possibilities for manoeuvring and counter-attacking in any direction. Throughout December the nazis had spared no effort to strengthen their positions. They had set up a system of strong points and resistance on the main and intermediary defence lines. In the western sector they made use of the fortifications of what had been our middle defence ring passing along the left bank of the Rossoshka and southeast along the right bank of the Chervlenaya. Here they had improved the defences by creating a continuous line of fortifications.

On the eastern sector of the ring, where our former inner defence ring had been, the enemy had also extended the system up to ten kilometres in depth, as far as the city itself. They had extensively mined the approaches to the resistance centres on sectors that might be threatened by tanks, and adapted railway embankments, damaged tanks, railway

trucks and engines for defence purposes. Thus, in addition to considerable forces, the surrounded enemy also had well-fortified positions considerably developed in depth to rely upon.

The conclusion to be drawn was that in the circumstances he would do everything in his power to keep up the resistance of the surrounded group at Stalingrad, thereby pinning down and containing large forces of ours and thus gaining time to close the tremendous breach in his front made by our successful offensive on the Stalingrad and Rostov sectors.

It is, of course, a thing of the past, but I still think that it would have been much wiser to use the 2nd Guards Army as GHQ had initially intended, that is, to mop up the surrounded grouping quickly. This bold plan offered tremendous possibilities for subsequent action on the southern wing of the Soviet-German front. The game would have been worth the candle, as they say.

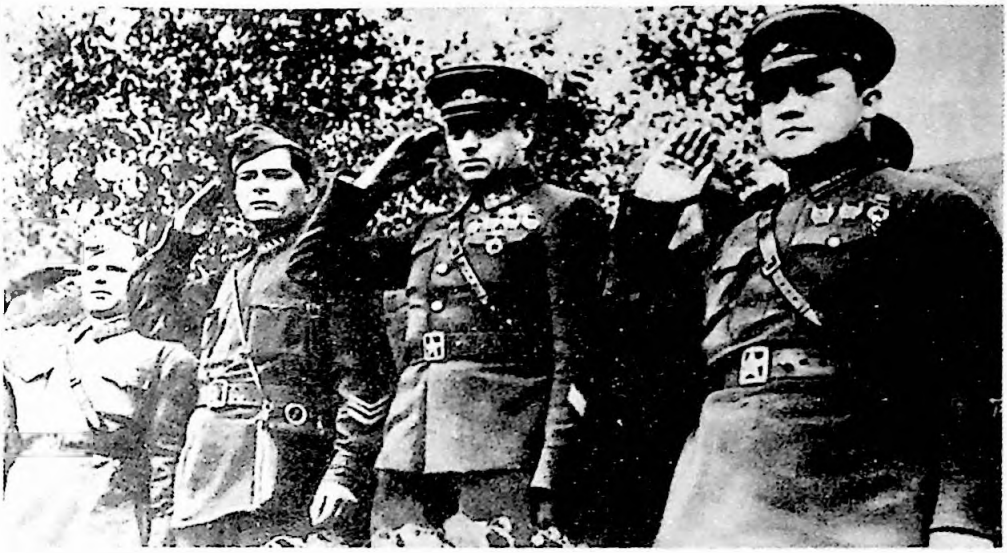
Of course, some may reply that today, when everything is so obvious, it is easy to engage in armchair combat. To this I can say that even in those days I had been all for using the 2nd Guards Army primarily for defeating the surrounded grouping, and had proposed that in the event of enemy forces approaching the pocket the whole 21st Army could have been turned to face them. GHQ had preferred the other variant, which provided reliable guarantees against any unforeseen exigencies.

Inside the pocket the nazis had several good airfields capable of simultaneously handling large numbers of aircraft. The airlift ferrying in food and ammunition to the surrounded troops had to be stopped. The task of organising the blockade was entrusted to air generals Novikov and Golovanov, who had been assigned to the Don Front, and they performed it well.

GHQ warned us not to count on any reinforcements in infantry or armour. This compelled all of us responsible for the operation, particularly the Front Commander, to provide for maximum utilisation of all the forces at our disposal.

Thanks to the tremendous amount of work carried out by the Front staff and the arm and service commanders, as well as the great help of GHQ representatives, Voronov, Novikov and Golovanov, we completed the preparations for the operation in good time.

By the beginning of the offensive the Front had received 20,000 replacements from GHQ Reserve, for the seven



Commander of the 16th Army Lieutenant-General K. K. Rokossovsky,
and Military Council Member, Divisional Commissar
A. A. Lobachov (right), reviewing the troops

N. V. Kalinin

S. P. Tarasov

I. A. Pliyev and L. M. Dovator

Commander of the 316th Infantry Division I. V. Panfilov, Chief of Staff I. I. Serebryakov, and Commissar S. A. Yegorov

F. D. Zakharov

I. T. Grishin

Colonel-General Belov presents sniper Komaretsky with a Tula submachine-gun

The Don Front HQ: A. A. Novikov, K. K. Rokossovsky, N. N. Voronov, K. F. Telegin, M. S. Malinin, and V. I. Kazakov

S. I. Rudenko

I. M. Chistyakov

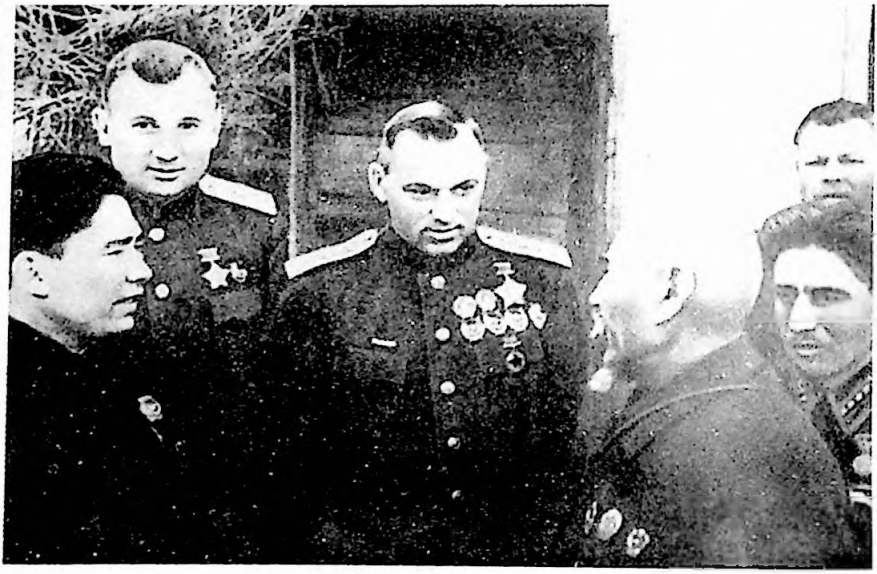
Meeting of the Don and Stalingrad Fronts closing the ring of encirclement of German forces at Stalingrad

Covering a crossing

P. I. Batov and G. N. Orvol

I. I. Fedyuninsky

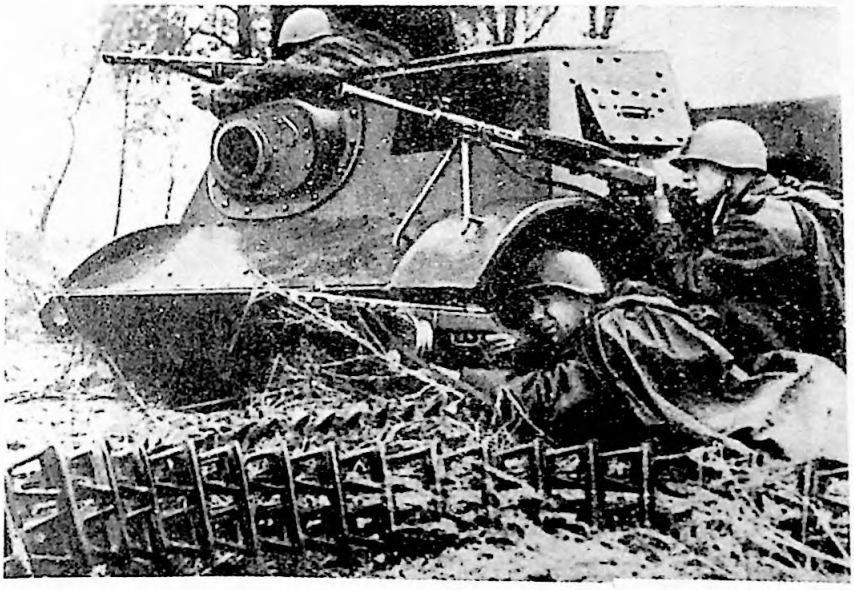
P. L. Romanenko



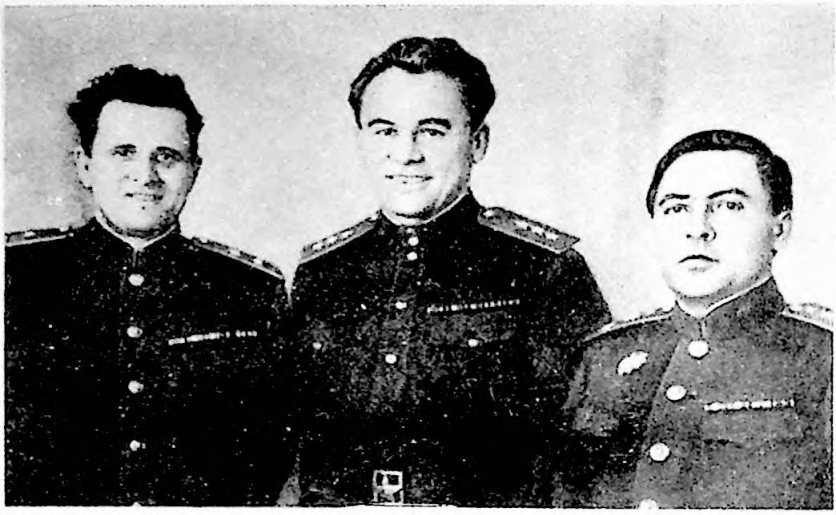
Commanders of the Central Front receive a delegation from Turkmenia

K. P. Trubnikov

A. I. Proshlyakov



On the right bank of the Sozh river

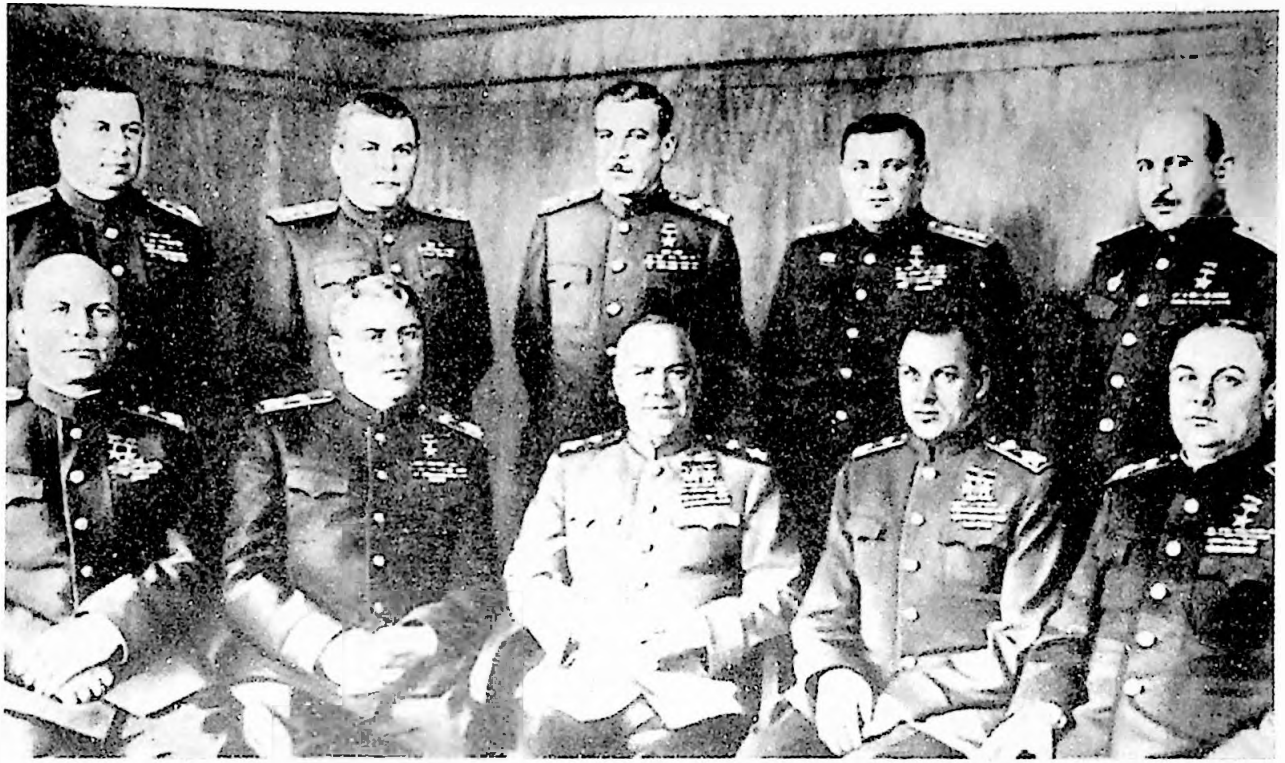


N. Y. Subbotin, K. A. Vershinin and A. K. Sokolsky

Chuikov outlines his army's plan of action

Aleksander Zawadzki, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army

Commander of the Polish 1st Infantry Division Z. Berling takes the oath of allegiance



The Front Commanders in the final stage. First row: I. S. Konev, A. M. Vasilevsky, G. K. Zhukov, K. K. Rokossovsky, K. A. Meretskov. Second row: F. I. Tolbukhin, R. Y. Malinovsky, L. A. Govorov, A. I. Eremenko, I. H. Bagramyan

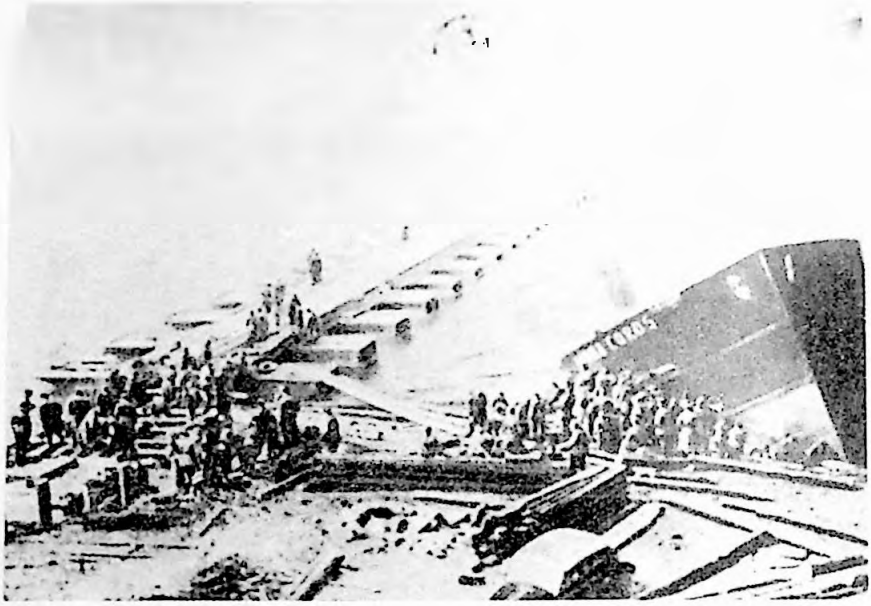
Y. D. Chanyshev

N. I. Gusev

Colonel Rogov's scouts on reaching the Baltic coast

A. V. Gorbatov

N. D. Vedeneyev



Throwing a bridge across the Oder

V. Z. Romanovsky

M. F. Panov

A. Y. Golovanov

I. D. Chernyakhovsky

A. P. Panfilov

V. T. Volsky

Rokossovsky greets Montgomery

armies in the field, however, this was no more than a drop in the ocean.

We marshalled another 10,000 men by cutting down logistic personnel, screening hospitals and medical battalions and placing everyone capable of carrying arms in line. At Voronov's insistence GHQ attached an assault artillery division, two heavy artillery gun regiments, one heavy artillery battalion, five antitank artillery regiments, one anti-aircraft artillery regiment, two rocket-launcher divisions and three Guards armour regiments. That was all we could count upon. For the rest we had to rely on the means at our disposal to carry out our mission. The thing was to make able use of them as the situation demanded.

Three armies were assigned to the main effort: on a narrow stretch in the centre, the 65th, reinforced with artillery and mortars of all calibres, rocket launchers, armour and engineer units; on the right, the 21st; on the left, the 24th, both reinforced with artillery and other means, though to a lesser degree.

The 16th Air Army was assigned to the main effort.

The other armies—57th, 64th, 62nd and 66th—were to attack on their respective sectors with limited objectives, the aim being to pin down as many enemy forces as possible and deny him any opportunity of manoeuvring. These armies had to rely entirely on their own resources.

Moscow kept hurrying us to start the offensive, but with GHQ representatives there to see the situation for themselves we managed to gain a respite to prepare our forces adequately. This was necessitated by delays in the arrival of artillery and other reinforcing means and also ammunition. The task of getting it all, especially the artillery and ammunition, to the front was shouldered by Voronov, who kept in constant contact with General A. V. Khrulyov, Chief of the Red Army's Logistics.

All the Front Command was busy preparing the troops for the offensive. Useful work was carried out by Front and Army political personnel and the Party and Komsomol organisations. Their efforts greatly contributed to the troops' high morale. Officers and men waited impatiently for the signal to mount the offensive.

Once, while touring the 65th Army, over a friendly cup of tea I reminded General Pavel Batov of a telephone conversation we had had during the heavy December fighting, when we had been continuously pestered with demands to

finish off the surrounded enemy, though we had completely lacked the means and forces to do so. I had telephoned Batov and inquired how the offensive was progressing.

"We're progressing," he had answered.

"How?"

"On all fours."

"And how far have you got?"

"Half-way up Kazachi Hill."

Disappointing as though the report was, I had been struck by the Army Commander's wry humour. I could imagine how he felt if he was forced by the situation to report in this manner. So I told him that since his troops were compelled to advance on all fours, since they were only half-way up, they might as well call off the offensive, withdraw to the line of departure, assume the defensive and engage in reconnaissance in force to keep the enemy tensed.

I knew I might get into bad trouble for this kind of initiative. In such cases I made a habit of appealing directly to Stalin. Usually he endorsed the Front Commander's decision, if the commander could offer weighty reasons for his action and stuck to his guns in proving his point. This time, too, Stalin had listened to me attentively, flared up momentarily, but then agreed with my decision. This had helped us to save manpower, materiel and ammunition for the decisive fighting.

Reminding Batov of our past experiences, I expressed confidence that now that his Army had been reinforced with so much artillery and other means, it would not have to advance "on all fours", and would get more than "half-way up". Batov agreed with me, though his Army had the tough job of delivering the first blow on the main line of advance.

Artillery was to play a major part in the operation, and special attention was therefore given to all questions relevant to its actions and co-ordination with infantry and armour. These problems were handled mainly by the Front Chief of Artillery, V. I. Kazakov, and his staff. They were men of knowledge and experience, and I had no doubt that the artillery would be put to the best possible uses and do all it could.

On December 31, taking advantage of a relative lull in the fighting, we decided to celebrate the New Year. The company that assembled in the headquarters included the Members of the Front Military Council, Moscow repre-

sentatives Vasilevsky, Novikov and Golovanov, and the writers Wanda Wasilewska and Alexander Korneichuk. On Novikov's request one of the incoming transport planes brought us a fir-tree, which we decorated as best we could. It was a spontaneous affair and a tremendous success.

We greeted the New Year in a friendly, comradely atmosphere. Many good wishes were expressed and the conversation was pervaded with a firm confidence in the ultimate victory over the enemy.

Naturally enough, we spoke of our families. Mine was already in Moscow, where my wife was taking active part in the work of the Soviet Women's Anti-Fascist Committee, and my daughter had joined a school for messenger scouts organised by the Central Partisan Headquarters.

In the course of the conversation someone remarked that history knew of many cases when an enemy facing defeat was issued an ultimatum offering the alternative of surrender. That evening no one gave the idea serious thought, but on the following day it occurred to me that perhaps it would be worthwhile suggesting to GHQ that we try out this ancient chivalrous custom. I think it was General Antonov, who was deputising for the Chief of the General Staff, with whom I discussed this over the telephone. He said he would take up the idea with the leadership and inform me of the results, and suggested that perhaps I should prepare a draft text of the ultimatum.

I told Voronov, Novikov, Golovanov, Malinin, Galadzhev and other generals of my conversation with Antonov. Everyone was greatly interested. Voronov also contacted Moscow. We had nothing on hand to be guided by and proceeded to recall what we knew from history of sieges of fortresses and cities.

Together we drew up the text of the ultimatum. Soon after, a call from GHQ informed us that Stalin thought it was a good idea and we were to submit our draft at once. The text was endorsed with minor ammendments. We were directed to hand the ultimatum to the commander of the German 6th Army, Colonel-General von Paulus, or his deputy, a day or two before the offensive.

The ultimatum is well known. It stated that the German 6th Army, units of the 4th Panzer Army and attached reinforcing units were completely surrounded by our troops since November 23, 1942. All attempts of the German Command to come to the aid of the surrounded troops had failed. Units

sent to the rescue had been defeated by the Red Army and their remnants were retreating towards Rostov. German transport aircraft ferrying the beleaguered troops their starvation rations of food, ammunition and fuel were suffering heavy losses in aircraft and crews from the Soviet Air Force. The help to the besieged forces provided by the airlift was dwindling and their situation was critical. They were suffering from hunger, disease and cold. The harsh Russian winter was only just beginning, bitter frosts, cold winds and blizzards were in the offing, while the German soldiers had no winter clothing and were in difficult, insanitary conditions.

"You, as the Commander, and all the officers of the encircled forces," the ultimatum went on, "fully realise that you have no real possibilities of breaking the ring of encirclement. Your position is hopeless and further resistance can serve no purpose whatever.

"In view of your hopeless position, and to avoid senseless bloodshed, we offer you the following terms of surrender:

"1. All surrounded German troops, headed by you and your staff, cease resistance.

"2. You are to hand over to us in an organised manner all your personnel, armaments, all military equipment and all military property in working order.

"We guarantee all officers, non-commissioned officers and men who cease resistance their lives, safety and, after the end of the war, return to Germany or to any other country to which they express a desire to go.

"All personnel of forces which surrender will retain their uniforms, badges of rank and medals, personal effects and valuables, and in the case of senior officers, their side-arms.

"All officers, non-commissioned officers and men who surrender shall be issued normal rations forthwith.

"All wounded, sick and frost-bitten shall receive immediate medical aid."

Provisions were also made for the manner in which the reply would be delivered.

The ultimatum ended with the warning that if the conditions were not accepted the Red Army would be compelled to take the matter to complete annihilation of the encircled German forces, and that the responsibility for this would rest with the German Command.

The ultimatum was signed by Artillery Colonel-General Voronov, as representative of the Headquarters of the

Supreme Command of the Red Army, and myself as Commander of the Don Front.

After some unpleasant negotiations with GHQ, the deadline for the offensive was put off, as we requested, from the 6th to the 10th of January. The troops had to make a tremendous effort to be ready even by that date. To accelerate preparations, the unit commanders visited the concentration area and elaborated their assignments on the spot before their units regrouped and occupied their positions. Actually, it would have taken a few more days to prepare completely for the assault, but GHQ was intransigent. We realised only too well that every hour counted. By then the overall situation on the southern wing of the Soviet-German front was extremely favourable for the Red Army. The Southern Front and Northern Army Group of the Transcaucasian Front had launched an offensive against the enemy's North Caucasian group. The Southwestern Front was continuing its offensive in the eastern part of the Donbas. The Voronezh Front was due to join the general offensive against the enemy grouping that held the upper Don.

To exploit the success of this major strategic operation GHQ needed reserves, and the sooner they arrived the greater the results that could be expected. With all this in mind, we worked to defeat the surrounded enemy as quickly as possible. The importance of this task was realised by all, from general to rank and file.

Prior to the offensive we scattered leaflets and beamed radio broadcasts to the enemy troops. This work was carried out under a plan drawn up by the Front HQ and Political Department. A group of German anti-fascists headed by that outstanding representative of the German working-class movement Walter Ulbricht and including the German writers Erich Weinert and Willy Bredel helped us greatly. They called upon the officers and men of the surrounded troops to cease their hopeless resistance and lay down arms before it was too late.

Under GHQ orders, we were to hand the ultimatum to the enemy two days before the offensive, and we decided to do so in the morning on January 8. The Front Intelligence Department under General I. V. Vinogradov, an excellent worker and fine comrade, was assigned to deal with all the formalities. It was recommended that the truce party should consist of volunteers. There were more than we needed, Vinogradov chose Major A. M. Smyslov to be the truce envoy; his inter-

preter was Captain N. D. Dyatlenko; to complete the ritual a trumpeter was assigned to them. Vinogradov himself undertook to follow our envoys at a distance and watch the developments without revealing his presence to the enemy.

On the preceding evening we had broadcast a message to General Paulus and his staff, stating that we would send a truce mission at a stated time to such-and-such a place, emphasising that they would be unarmed and would carry a white flag. As they approached the appointed place a trumpeter would play the signal announcing their arrival. On the section where the truce envoys were to meet all fire would be suspended for the duration of the procedure. The same conditions were proposed to the enemy, who was invited to send out duly authorised officers at the stated time.

Of course, we kept the sector of the front under close observation and alerted our gunners and troops in case of any emergency.

We spent the night from the 7th to 8th of January in a state of tense excitement (to judge by myself). The only topic debated at supper was what the following morning would bring. The GHQ representatives joined in the general conversation and voiced all kinds of conjectures. How much we all wanted the enemy to comprehend the logic of events. How many lives could be saved!

The German Command was given the opportunity to avert the catastrophe looming over the surrounded troops. Common sense ought to suggest them the only sensible decision, namely, to accept the surrender conditions.

At the stated time our truce envoys emerged from their dugout carrying a white flag and, to the blare of the trumpet, headed for the German positions.

As Voronov and I had expected, no one came out to meet them from the enemy side. What was more, the Germans opened fire, at first with rifles, then with machine-guns and even mortars.

The envoys were forced to return. Poor Vinogradov had to crawl for some distance, as the Germans for some reason concentrated much of the fire on him.

Our magnanimous gesture towards an enemy in a critical situation met with no good response. In flagrant violation of all international norms, the nazis had opened up fire against truce envoys. There was nothing left for us but to resort to force.

We reported the results to GHQ, and the same day I visited the 65th Army to settle the final questions of the offensive on the spot. The troops were occupying the line of departure and the assignments were being worked out at regiment and battalion level.

We gathered for a final conference in Batov's dugout, and the Army Chief of Staff, General Glebov, in the presence of the arms and services chiefs reported on the readiness of the troops. I decided to reinforce the 65th Army with two more infantry divisions from the 24th and one from the 21st.

That day I also visited the 21st Army Commander, General Chistyakov. In my presence, the Army Chief of Staff, V. A. Penkovsky, reported to the Army Commander on the troops' readiness for their mission. I was mainly concerned with the question of co-ordination between Batov's and Chistyakov's armies and the elimination of the so-called Marinovsky salient, where enemy positions cut deeply into our frontline. It was essential to chop off the salient at the very outset of the operation, as this would greatly facilitate the operations of both armies.

While I was with the 21st Army, Malinin called up and reported that Voronov had spoken with GHQ, who had suggested that perhaps we might try sending truce envoys on the southern side of the pocket, where Tolbukhin's army held the front. I replied that if GHQ thought it might be useful I had no objections, but I was certain that nothing would come out of it. I instructed Malinin to organise the mission. We continued day and night to broadcast the surrender conditions over the radio. Airplanes scattered leaflets calling upon the German officers and men to cease their resistance.

The same two officers who had been our truce envoys the previous day volunteered again for the mission. In the morning of January 9, they safely reached the enemy positions, where they were met at the agreed place by German officers. The envoys refused to give them the envelope and demanded that they be conducted to the Command Post. They were led there blindfolded, and when the bandages were removed from their eyes they saw a group of senior German officers. In their presence one of the officers reported over the telephone to his superior that the Soviet truce envoys had arrived and were insisting that they hand over the surrender proposals to von Paulus in person. After a short time our envoys were told that the German Command

refused to accept the ultimatum, the contents of which they knew from our radio broadcasts. The envoys returned without mishap. Once again our attempt to appeal to the reason of the German Command had failed. We reported the results of our truce mission to GHQ, and they wished us success in attaining the objective by force of arms.

I decided to watch the beginning of the offensive from the sector of the 65th Army, which was delivering the main effort. In the company of N. N. Voronov and V. I. Kazakov, I arrived at Batov's CP under cover of darkness. By that time our forces had occupied the line of departure. With all preparations completed, a dead silence descended as the troops awaited the signal for the attack.

Bright flashes lit up the enemy rear as Golovanov's long-range bombers pounded airfields and major objectives. Then the explosions moved closer to the frontline as Rudenko's aircraft proceeded to soften up enemy artillery positions. Anti-aircraft guns went into action on different sectors, but the Germans withheld ground artillery fire, and the impression was that the enemy was crouching in expectation.

At the appointed time, 0805 hrs, signal flares soared into the sky, and our artillery, mortars and rocket launchers opened fire. The artillery preparation lasted 55 minutes, after which a rolling barrage accompanied our infantry and tanks attacking the enemy positions. The attack was also supported by air strikes. All the troops along the whole perimeter of investment rose simultaneously to the attack.

On some sectors our artillery and air strikes had neutralised the German defences through the whole depth of the first line of resistance, but surviving units fought desperately. In some places the enemy threw regimental and divisional reserves into the fighting, counterattacking with tank support. Nevertheless, the 65th Army infantry supported by isolated tanks or direct-fire guns, advanced slowly but steadily. The fighting began to drag and our troops literally had to gnaw through the enemy defences. Meanwhile enemy fire increased. Several times I had to change the position from which I was watching the battle to escape enemy mortar fire, and twice I even came under machine-gun fire. However, in spite of the nazis' stubborn resistance, by the end of the day units of the 65th Army succeeded in penetrating their defences to a depth of up to five kilometres along the whole of the 12-kilometre frontage. The 21st Army on the left flank and the 24th on the right were some-

what less successful. On other sectors the advance was negligible, but the operations of the armies there pinned down large enemy forces, helping the units delivering the main effort.

Although our troops failed to carry out their whole task on the first day of the offensive, the success achieved on the main line of advance by units of the 65th, 21st and 24th Armies was of great importance. Several major enemy strongholds were bypassed and the enemy's main defence line was breached. It had to be crushed without granting the enemy any respite and we continued the offensive, with necessary adjustments prompted by the experience of the first day of fighting.

The offensive continued day and night. Brief breathing spells were permitted only on isolated sectors for regrouping within armies.

The enemy's resistance did not diminish, but our troops battered him stubbornly and continued to advance. By the evening of January 12, the 65th and 21st Armies, acting in co-operation on their adjoining flanks, finally eliminated the Marinovsky salient. The enemy's 44th and 376th Infantry and 3rd Motorised Divisions defending it were routed. Our troops reached the River Rossoshka, greatly enhancing our position. However, some regrouping of forces was essential, as the spearhead of the main effort was shifted to the zone of attack of the 21st Army. Accordingly, the greater part of the reinforcing means, originally at Batov's disposal, was transferred to the 21st. The Army was to strike with its left flank in the direction of Dubovaya Ravine-Voropanovo railway station. The 65th, acting in co-operation, was to strike with its right flank in the general direction of Pitomnik. The 24th, whose right flank continued to push ahead, was to cover the 65th from the north. The other armies carried on with their original tasks.

By shifting our efforts to the 21st Army zone we aimed at breaking up the enemy defences as quickly as possible and exploiting the success in depth on the main line of advance. The regrouping was effected without slackening the assault in the main strike zone.

On January 15, our troops carried the well-fortified second defence system, having by then advanced from 10 to 22 kilometres on the central sector. The inner defence system now lay before us. The enemy had put up some formidable fortifications: powerful strong points with numerous machine-

gun emplacements, pillboxes and tanks dug into the ground, and the approaches enmeshed in barbed wire and densely mined.

The frost had dropped to 22° C, with a stinging blizzard. Our troops would have to advance over open ground against an enemy sheltered in trenches, dugouts and bunkers. It required more than ordinary courage to carry these formidable defences. Our men performed their duty unstintingly, storming trench after trench, bunker after bunker, and paying the price in blood for every step forward.

The enemy's situation deteriorated steadily. As our troops advanced he lost airfields and landing strips; his aircraft ventured to fly only at night, dropping food, ammunition and fuel by parachute. Our air blockade worked well and most enemy transport planes were shot down or turned back before they could reach their destinations.

The nazis derived some help from the large number of horses they had in the cavalry division and baggage trains, which they now began to slaughter for food.

It was not long before we made the unpleasant discovery that the enemy forces in the pocket were much greater than we had originally estimated. Today it is hard to say who was to blame for this miscalculation: the mopping-up operations had been commenced by two fronts, the Don and Stalingrad, and the figure named at the time had been 80,000-85,000; it may, perhaps, have included only the troops operating directly against the Don Front. Now we suddenly discovered that, after all the fighting, the enemy still numbered some 200,000 effectives! This was confirmed by numerous reconnaissance and intelligence reports and POW statements. (Incidentally, the GHQ representative, General Voronov, was also very interested to know the true number of German troops, and on several occasions interrogated prisoners personally.)

Of course, with each passing day the number decreased, as the enemy suffered considerable losses in the fighting, but in spite of the hopelessness of his position he still continued to put up a fierce resistance.

The protracted fighting in difficult conditions also wore down our troops, who suffered not only from enemy fire but from cold as well. The men were continuously in the open, they had no opportunity of even occasionally going inside for a warm. The rate of losses increased but the sources from which we had formerly drawn replacements had

reached rock bottom. At the same time, enemy resistance did not diminish, as his defence perimeter contracted together with the territory he held.

Our shortage of infantry compelled us to rely heavily on artillery to soften up and wear down the enemy's defences. Infantry was used mainly for consolidating newly acquired lines.

I was frequently at the forward positions and had plenty of opportunity to observe the condition of our advancing formations. Thin skirmish lines advanced over snowswept fields, followed closely by direct-fire artillery, each formation advancing in turn. The artillery positions, it should be said, were better manned than the infantry lines. A dozen or so tanks dotted the vast battlefield, and under their cover small groups of infantry advanced in rushes. Artillery also supported the advancing troops with fire from covered positions. Once in a while a rocket salvo hit the enemy. Our attack aircraft did everything to support the thinly stretched infantry lines, striking at enemy resistance centres, in groups if weather permitted, or carrying out lone sorties if it was unfavourable.

In this battle our airmen won the deep respect of the ground forces.

The protracted fighting compelled us to regroup without halting the advance, so as to build up superior strength at one sector or another. We resorted to various modes of artillery fire, carrying out surprise fire assaults, misleading the enemy by fake shifting of fire, etc.

Slowly, step by step our forces pushed the enemy back on the main line of advance while the other armies, operating on narrow frontages pinned down substantial forces. Soon only 3.5 kilometres separated units of the eastward-striking 21st and 65th Armies from those of the 62nd slowly advancing towards them westwards from the Volga. The enemy's resistance reached a frenzied pitch and it was obvious that he was doing everything to keep us from slicing his forces in two. His efforts, however, were in vain. The realisation that the gallant defenders of Stalingrad were so close multiplied the fighting spirit of the men of the Don Front tenfold.

In anticipation of this link-up identification signs and signals were agreed upon. Units of the 62nd, 65th and 66th Armies received instructions for mopping up the surrounded enemy in the northern part of the pocket, and the 21st, 57th

and 64th Armies, in the southern. The 24th Army was being withdrawn to the GHQ Reserve.

In the morning of January 26, the 51st and 52nd Guards Infantry Divisions and 121st Tank Brigade of the 21st Army, attacking without artillery preparation in the neighbourhood of Krasny Oktyabr and on the slopes of Mamayev Kurgan, linked up with the 13th Guards and 284th Infantry Divisions of the 62nd Army advancing from the city. After a pitched battle in the neighbourhood of Krasny Oktyabr, General I. F. Barinov's 233rd Infantry Division on the right flank of the 65th Army also succeeded in establishing contact with the 62nd Army's 13th and 39th Guards Divisions.

Thus, our plan of slicing the surrounded enemy group in two was crowned with complete success. Now we got down to the much simpler task of mopping up the divided enemy forces.

Our Front Headquarters had estimated that, by the time the enemy grouping was split, that is, January 26, his forces had numbered some 110,000 or 120,000. In the fighting between January 10 and 25, that is, sixteen days, he had lost more than 100,000 men. Surely common sense might have suggested that now, when all hope of salvaging the remnants of his troops was lost and further resistance could result only in the annihilation of his men, the enemy should lay down arms. This, however, did not happen.

The Commander of the German 6th Army, by now Field-Marshal von Paulus, decided to continue resistance, delegating command of the southern group, where he was himself, to Major-General Roske, and of the northern group to Infantry General Strecker.

Thus, the Don Front, now without the 24th Army and a number of divisions, which had been withdrawn to the GHQ Reserve (a justified decision), was faced with the task of liquidating the rest of the resisting enemy by force. In the southern pocket, our 21st, 57th and 64th Armies held the battered remnants of six nazi infantry divisions, two motorised divisions and one cavalry division at bay. In the northern pocket the 65th, 66th and 62nd Armies held, as in a vise, three panzer, one motorised and eight infantry divisions, also severely battered.

After regrouping to meet the new situation, our troops struck at the southern group from the southwest and northwest, overran the enemy and on January 31 forced him to lay down arms.

Field-Marshal von Paulus was taken prisoner together with his staff, and the same evening he was conducted to our Front HQ.

Voronov, an interpreter and I sat at a small table and waited with understandable impatience for Paulus to be brought in. A plain bulb lit up the room. Finally the door opened, a duty officer entered and reported that the prisoner had arrived, stepped aside and allowed the Field-Marshal to enter.

We saw a tall, spare, erect man in a general's field uniform. He halted at attention before us. We invited him to the table. There were cigars and cigarettes. I offered them to Paulus and lit one myself (Voronov did not smoke). We offered him a glass of hot tea, which he gratefully accepted.

Our conversation was not in the nature of an interrogation. We spoke of current events, mainly of the condition of prisoners of war. Paulus began by expressing the hope that we should not compel him to answer questions that might invoke a breach of his military oath, and we promised not to. At the end we suggested that he instruct his troops in the northern group to give up their hopeless resistance. He declined, claiming that as a prisoner of war he had no right to issue orders. This concluded our first meeting. Paulus was led away to his quite comfortable quarters.

The northern group refused to lay down arms, and we proceeded to prepare a new blow. I went straight from the interview with Paulus to General Batov's Army CP, taking Kazakov and Oryol with me. By dawn we were all with Batov at his OP on the crest of a railway embankment from which we had an excellent view of the ground.

Army Commanders, Chuikov and Zhadov, reported that their troops were ready for action and that the enemy showed no intention of laying down arms. Well, we would have to force him to do so.

A dead silence fell over the battlefield. Dawn broke, and from the OP we could see the artillery positions not far behind us. Rows of rocket launchers stood out in sharp relief, reminding me, an old cavalryman, of cavalry squadrons deployed for the attack.

Many artillery units, including those that had taken part in the rout of the southern group, and the 16th Air Army were concentrated for the strike. Everything was done to cut our losses to the minimum in the coming engagement.

In the morning of February 1, a squall of fire descended on the enemy positions. From the OP we saw a sea of shell and mortar blasts envelop the whole of the forward area. Our aircraft delivered bombing attacks on artillery positions in the depth of the enemy defences. The cannonade lasted a long time. When it subsided, we saw white flags rise in many places over the smouldering black earth. They appeared spontaneously, against the will of the German Command, and whereas at some points the enemy surrendered, at others fighting continued for a whole day. Only in the morning of February 2 the remnants of the northern group began to surrender en masse—and again against the will of the nazi command.

The encircled enemy grouping had ceased to exist. The great battle on the Volga was over.

As I have mentioned before, twenty-two divisions and numerous reinforcing and service units of the German 6th Army had been surrounded at Stalingrad. The nazi command and Hitler clique had doomed hundreds of thousands of men to death and annihilation by forcing them to hold out for several months without the slightest hope of rescue. It was only the humane attitude of the Soviet people that saved the lives of so many German soldiers. Yesterday's enemies stood before us, disarmed, abject, some with eyes expressing indifference or fear, others already with glimmerings of hope.

More than 90,000 officers and men were taken prisoner. In the mopping-up operations the troops of the Don Front captured 5,762 artillery pieces, more than 3,000 mortars, over 12,000 machine-guns, 156,987 rifles, more than 10,000 submachine-guns, 744 aircraft, 1,666 tanks, 261 armoured cars, 80,438 trucks and cars, more than 10,000 motorcycles, 811 caterpillar and wheel tractors of different types, three armoured trains, 58 locomotives, 1,403 railway trucks, 696 radio stations, 933 telephone sets, 337 dumps and depots of different kinds, 13,787 carts and a great amount of other materiel.

Among the prisoners were 24 generals and a field-marshal.

The victory was achieved in extremely difficult conditions. It was a feat of which only the Soviet people and their Red Army, led by the Leninist Communist Party, were capable.

With the fighting over, the Don Front Command and Headquarters were faced with the task of dispatching the troops of seven armies with their staffs and services on new

assignments with the utmost haste. At the same time everything had to be done to restore the large Stalingrad railway junction as quickly as possible, repairing railway tracks and everything else necessary for the transport system to start working. By the end of the fighting all this was a shambles. The fiercest battles had raged here, and the slightest rise on the terrain—embankment, mound or structure—had been fortified. All the railway embankments were in a terrible state.

We also had our hands full with the prisoners of war. The frosts, made worse by the treeless country that provided no shelter, the absence of housing, most of which had been destroyed in the fighting (all the intact buildings were turned into hospitals), further aggravated the situation.

In the first place, it was necessary to disperse the huge mass of prisoners, organise marching columns, get them out of the city ruins, take measures to prevent epidemics, and provide food, water and warmth for tens of thousands of people. Thanks to the titanic efforts of workers of the Front and Army rear services and political and medical personnel, this task was carried out. Their intense and, under such conditions, truly self-sacrificing work saved the lives of the prisoners.

Endless columns of German prisoners took to the roads. They were headed by German officers who were made responsible for the maintenance of army discipline on the march and at halts. The officer in charge of each column had a card with the route, halts and places of rest for the night indicated on it. Fuel, hot food and hot water were provided at the halts. According to the personal observations of staff and political officers and reports from the people responsible for the evacuation of the prisoners, there were no irregularities.

I must say that the prisoners themselves showed quite a lot of foresight: each had his spoon, mug and mess-tin with him.

The attitude of Red Army officers and men to the prisoners was truly humane, even magnanimous. This despite all we knew about the inhumanities perpetrated by the nazis against our people who had fallen into their hands.

The captive generals were billeted in houses, in the best conditions possible in the circumstances. They all had their personal effects with them and suffered no wants.

I spoke with some of them, but nothing of interest was said and the conversations are not worth describing. I could

mention though, that the tact with which we treated the captive generals had the effect of putting mistaken ideas in their heads. Some of them began to put on airs, talk rudely, refuse to fulfil the legitimate demands of our administration and high-handedly demand special privileges for themselves. They had to be politely reminded that, after all, they were prisoners of war and should know their place.

On February 4, on orders from GHQ, Voronov and I left for Moscow, and we were unable to take part in the meeting held in Stalingrad to celebrate the enemy's defeat and the liberation of the city.

We flew by plane, arriving in Moscow on the same day. As the plane taxied towards the tarmac I was surprised and even somewhat alarmed by the sight of the generals and officers meeting us. They all wore gold braided shoulder straps.

"Look here, where have we come to?" I said to Voronov.

He too was at a loss. However, we noticed familiar faces, and soon the mystery was cleared up. It was simply that shoulder straps had been introduced in the Red Army in place of collar tabs; and we hadn't even known.

The same day we drove to the Kremlin, where we were eceived by Stalin. When we entered he walked swiftly ıwards us and, without giving us time to report our arrival ccording to regulations, started shaking our hands and ongratulating us on the successful completion of the operation against the enemy grouping. He was quite obviously very pleased with the course that events were taking. We had a long conversation during which Stalin expressed some ideas on the prospects of further military operations.

Accompanied by wishes of new successes, we left Stalin's office. I cannot refrain from stating that, when necessary, Stalin could literally charm a person by his warmth and attention and make one remember every meeting with him for a long time.

With orders to return at once to Stalingrad, I bid Voronov farewell. We parted as good friends, and I have the best memories of our work together.

The headquarters and staff of the Don Front, now renamed the Central Front, were instructed to move at once to the neighbourhood of Yelets, where the 21st and 65th Field Armies and 16th Air Army were being sent together with several formations and units from the GHQ Reserve.

THE KURSK BULGE

At my last meeting with Stalin he had told me that I was being assigned a new task on the success of which much depended. At GHQ I was shown the general plan of the offensive on the Kursk sector. It was to be carried out by the new Central Front, comprising the 21st and 65th Field and 16th Air Armies of the Don Front, and the 2nd Tank and 70th Armies and a number of units from the GHQ Reserve.

This new Front was to be deployed between the Bryansk and Voronezh Fronts, which were continuing the offensive on the Kursk and Kharkov sectors. In co-operation with the Bryansk Front it was to execute a deep turning movement in the general direction of Gomel, Smolensk, aimed at the flank and rear of the enemy's Orel group.

The beginning of this beautifully planned operation had been timed for February 15. However, it was first necessary to deploy the troops, the bulk of which were, with their rear services, still in the neighbourhood of Stalingrad.

My objections that the date was unrealistic failed to sway GHQ. Of course, one could understand the desire to mount the operation as quickly as possible, before the enemy had time to draw up forces from other sectors and the rear. But, in the circumstances, such an extensive regrouping of troops was an extremely complicated undertaking. True, I was promised all possible help.

There was nothing left for me to do but hurry back to Stalingrad and get down to the job of organising the movement of troops, materiel and rear services to the concentration area.

From the outset we encountered tremendous difficulties. There was only one single-track railway functioning—the only one that had been restored by then. Naturally, it could not handle such heavy traffic. Our transportation plans were bursting at the seams. Traffic schedules collapsed, there were not enough troop trains, and in those that were avail-

able the trucks were, as often as not, unsuited fo · carrying personnel or horses.

Our report on these difficulties, however, only had the effect of aggravating the situation. The job of accelerating the troop movements was given to the NKVD, and its men pitched into it with such zeal, clamping down so hard on the railway authorities that the latter lost their heads completely and whatever timetables and schedules had existed till then now went up in smoke. Troops began to arrive at the concentration area all mixed up. Artillery units came without draught horses or tractors, which as often as not were still at the entraining point. Or a unit's materiel might have been unloaded at one station while the men were detrained at another. Troop trains were held up at stations and sidings for days on end. Owing to train shortage, 169 logistical establishments and units remained stuck at Stalingrad. I had to ask GHQ to give the railway authorities the opportunity to handle their affairs themselves. The necessary instructions were soon issued, but it was some time before we were able to sort out where and what units had been detrained.

Meanwhile time was pressing and I had to be moving. Leaving my deputy, General Trubnikov, and a group of officers at Stalingrad, I headed with the Front Headquarters and Command for the neighbourhood of Yelets, where we set up the Command Post.

While liaison and communications were being established with the troops assembling in the area I went with a group of officers to the headquarters of the Bryansk Front, our neighbour on the right with whom we were to act in co-ordination. The Front Commander was General M. A. Reiter, an old acquaintance of mine from the time of my service in the Transbaikal area and the Chinese Eastern Railway campaign of 1929. It was a gruelling ride through deep snow. The poor road served as additional reminder of the trials that awaited our troops even before they engaged the enemy.

We were cordially welcomed by our neighbours, who were to mount an offensive on February 12 and who counted on the support of our Front. After getting acquainted with the situation on Reiter's sector and discussing questions of troop co-ordination at the Fronts' boundary line, I assigned to the units deploying in the concentration area tasks aimed at covering the neighbour's left flank when he advanced.

Back at our CP, together with the staff officers, I studied

all available intelligence and reconnaissance data and the ground on which the troops were to operate. The situation proved to be much worse than we had expected.

The concentration area, just liberated from the enemy, was unprepared for receiving large masses of troops, materiel and equipment, and the work of setting up bases, organising approach routes and logistical support had to be carried on simultaneously with the preparations for the offensive.

The only available railway was a line from Kastornoye to Kursk, with a short branch from Livny to Marmyzhi. Trains could travel only as far as Shchigry. A seemingly endless blizzard blocked what few roads there were. Snowdrifts were so deep that the railway embankment on the section Zolotukhino-Budanovka had to be used as a motor road.

Long columns of troops, trucks and armour made their way with difficulty from the detraining points westward along the only motor road, Yelets-Livny-Zolotukhino. Owing to the shortage of trucks and horses, men often had to carry heavy machine-guns, antitank rifles and even mortars on their backs. The artillery lagged far behind the troops. We would have been in real trouble with ammunition supply but for the help of local peasants who transported shells from one village to another in sleighs and carts. In general the people of liberated villages helped us in every way. Lacking food or shelter themselves, they shared what little they had with the soldiers and did their best to keep them warm.

The trains and logistical units were still far away from the concentration area, and this greatly impeded troop supplies. The long, difficult treks over snowswept terrain wore the men out, but even on arriving at their destination they found no facilities for normal rest.

As a result the forces of the newly organised Central Front were unable to concentrate on time, and the beginning of the offensive was postponed to February 25. By that time we did receive some of the troops of the 65th Army and, from the GHQ Reserve, the 2nd Tank Army (which still had to collect many of its tanks stranded en route), the 2nd Cavalry Corps, and two ski brigades. These troops were deployed on a frontage of 150 kilometres on the line Chern, Mikhailovka, Konyshevka, Makarovka. The 21st Army was still en route from Stalingrad to Yelets; the 70th Army,

from the GHQ Reserve, was approaching the concentration area.

Time was up, however, and we had to launch the offensive. The 65th Army, with several divisions of the Bryansk Front operating in our zone subordinated to it, set out in the direction of Mikhailovka, Lyutezh; to its right the 70th Army headed towards Dmitrovsk; on the left Lieutenant-General A. G. Rodin's 2nd Tank Army drove towards Sevsk; and on the Front's left flank General V. V. Kryukov's 2nd Guards Cavalry Corps, reinforced with the two ski brigades and a tank regiment, advanced in the direction of Khutor Mikhailovsky, Novgorod-Seversky.

The offensive began successfully enough. The 65th Army, supported by the 70th, threw the enemy back and reached Komarichi and Lyutezh; the 2nd Tank Army took Seredina-Buda, and the cavalry group, encountering slight resistance, penetrated even farther. Suspecting a trick on the part of the enemy, I ordered Kryukov to stop and dig in on the line of Sevsk. But the old war horse was flushed with success and it was not so easy to hold him back in mid-career. He pushed on as far as the Desna River and Novgorod-Seversky, showing little or no concern for reconnaissance on his flanks.

Our units had advanced considerably. Our neighbours, though, had fared worse. The Bryansk Front, which had assumed the offensive on February 12, had pushed the enemy back as much as 30 km in places, but by the end of February it ground to a halt on the line Novosil, Maloarkhangelsk, Rozhdestvenskoye. The Western Front's left-flank 16th Army, which had attacked in co-ordination with us, had also failed to score success.

In undertaking such a large-scale operation as a deep envelopment of the whole of the enemy's Orel group, GHQ had evidently miscalculated. For by that time the enemy had begun to recover from the body blows received on the Bryansk and Kharkov sectors and had begun to prepare a counterattack himself. More and more formations had been transferred from the Vyazma-Rzhev grouping to Orel and to the south. Partisans and air reconnaissance had warned us of concentrations of enemy forces in the neighbourhood of Bryansk and troop movements in the direction of Sevsk. Enemy units had also concentrated north of Rylsk and Shostka.

All our troops had been committed to action on the by then greatly extended frontage. The enemy had quite

obviously edged ahead of us in the concentration and deployment of forces. Our 21st Army had only just detrained at Yelets, the logistical services had been stranded as far back as Stalingrad, and there was an acute shortage of food, fodder, fuel and ammunition.

We had made another grave blunder at the very outset of the operation. In the hurry of getting the troops to the new area we had failed to study the terrain in advance; nor had we brought up our road and transport units and their machines together with the combat troops. The higher bodies who had planned the operation for the newly created Front had also overlooked this. Their only thought had been of redeploying the fighting units as quickly as possible, and the result was that they had been left without roads or transport. The necessary adjustments had had to be made in the course of the concentration and actual fighting.

I reported to Stalin that in the circumstances the Front would be unable to carry out its task. Shortly afterwards the task was changed, and we were ordered to strike northwards towards Orel with the 21st and 70th Armies and the 2nd Tank Army. The aim was to rout the enemy s Orel grouping in co-ordination with the Bryansk Front and the left wing of the Western Front. However, as things stood, this operation, too, held no promise of success: the enemy was considerably superior to us in strength.

We were greatly worried about our cavalry group, on whose flanks there had been a suspiciously large build-up of enemy forces. I repeated my order to Kryukov to halt his advance westward, dig in along the River Sev and hold Sevsk until the approach of the 65th Army. I also warned him to step up reconnaissance in the northern and southern directions. But it was too late. The enemy struck at the flanks and rear of his cavalry force that had reached out to the Desna. At the cost of considerable losses the group fought its way out of the trap, greatly assisted by units of the 2nd Tank and 65th Armies, which had hastened to the rescue.

To halt the enemy here, we had to deploy the 65th Army on a wide front along the eastern bank of the River Sev.

There was, however, one consolation. The successful advance of our troops had helped the Voronezh Front, on our left, by diverting considerable enemy forces from its sector. Our neighbour's 60th Army had succeeded in advancing, and the enemy's withdrawal of large forces to operate

against us markedly eased the position of the Voronezh Front when the nazis themselves launched the offensive there.

On receiving the new assignment we proceeded to regroup, concentrating the bulk of our forces on the Orel sector, where the main attack was to be delivered. The 70th Army, newly arrived from the GHQ Reserve, was also poised there. This Army was made up of frontier guards, stalwart men all of them, well-trained for combat in any situation. We placed great hopes on this Army and deployed it on the most important sector, the boundary with the Bryansk Front on the right flank. Its performance, however, was disappointing. This was primarily due to the inexperience of the senior commanders, who had never been in such a complex battle situation before. The units had been thrown into the fighting direct from the march, in batches, in a highly unorganised fashion, and without artillery support.

While placing the blame for the Army's failures on its command and staff, I cannot completely absolve myself and my own staff of the responsibility for this. In our haste to commit the Army to action, we had assigned it its task without checking the troops' preparedness or getting to know the command personnel properly. This served as an object lesson for me for the future.

As soon as I could, I drove out to the 70th Army together with the Military Council Member, Telegin. It was not an easy trip, and we had to travel first by car along the road, then by sledge through a forest cutting, and finally, some fifteen kilometres on skis through snowdrifts.

A review of the situation on the spot led us to the conclusion that the Army Commander would have to be replaced and the staff reinforced with more experienced officers. We saw to it that the necessary changes were carried out without delay, as fresh fighting was in the offing.

The situation, meanwhile, was steadily deteriorating. The Bryansk Front had encountered fierce resistance and had halted on the line Novosil, Arkhangelskoye, Rozhdestvenskoye. The Front Commander, Reiter, reported that the enemy had reinforced the Orel group, and he expected a counterblow at any moment. Then Voronezh Front HQ sounded the alarm: the enemy had mounted an offensive, was fighting for Kharkov and advancing on Belgorod.

On our section nazi resistance stiffened greatly, and the fighting had begun to drag. We still cherished the hope that by committing the 21st Army we would succeed in pushing the enemy back, but the hope was a slim one. The time was clearly not ripe for an attack, we would merely be weakening our forces in vain. It was at this moment of serious reflection concerning the fate of our advance that I received orders from GHQ to switch the 21st Army urgently to the neighbourhood of Oboyan and put it at the disposal of the Commander of the Voronezh Front: large enemy forces had broken through on the Kharkov and Belgorod sectors and were threatening an advance on Kursk.

I had to report to GHQ that our own situation was none too good. Our troops and rear services were arriving slowly, supplies were haphazard, and the enemy had greatly bolstered his group facing our Front. With the 21st Army's departure the balance would be tipped even further against us.

Following my report, in the latter half of March GHQ decided that there was nothing to be gained by continuing the offensive against Orel. This was a correct decision, and our spirits rose.

The Central Front was directed to assume the defensive on the line Gorodishche, Maloarkhangelsk, Trosna, Lyutezh, Korenevo. Our forces were supplemented by P. L. Romanenko's 48th Army and N. P. Pukhov's 13th Army, which we took over from the Bryansk Front together with the sector it held, and I. D. Chernyakhovsky's 60th Army from the Voronezh Front, also with its sector. By then both our neighbours had repulsed the enemy attacks and, like us, had assumed the defensive.

The nazi command had failed in their objective of encircling and wiping out our troops in the Kursk area by strikes from Orel in the north and Belgorod in the south. However, they had been able, at a price, to hold on to two important salients, one east and southeast of Orel and the other east and northeast of Kharkov. These two stubbornly defended salients formed the shoulders of the huge Kursk Bulge which jutted out from our line nearly 200 kilometres to the west, and was defended by the Central and Voronezh Fronts.

The Front Command, Staff and Political Department got down to their new tasks. It was necessary to organise a defence system which the enemy would be incapable of

piercing, that is, it had to be deeply echeloned and especially strong against tanks. Made wise by the bitter experience of past battles, we knew that in mounting an offensive the enemy would throw in large numbers of tanks, and we had to be ready to repel them.

In the past months the enemy had often succeeded in breaching our defences all too easily. This was how we had lost Kharkov and Belgorod. In my view, this was due to our failure to create the necessary reserves, so that, when attacking, we stretched our forces to the very limit, drawing the front out into a thin thread and losing contact with the rear bases. Our tactical and strategic intelligence provided us with inadequate information. and the enemy, by retreating, succeeded in creating powerful striking forces with which he counterattacked suddenly, while we had nothing to parry his blows with. The absence of tactical reserves in depth made it possible for the enemy, once he had penetrated the front on a narrow sector, to envelope our troops practically with impunity.

In April a group of high-ranking officials arrived from Moscow to review the situation and determine the Front's needs; it included G. M. Malenkov, Member of the State Defence Committee, A. V. Khrulyov, Chief of the Red Army's Logistics, A. I. Antonov, Deputy Chief of the General Staff, and P. K. Ponomarenko, First Secretary of the CC of the Byelorussian Communist Party and Chief of the Central Partisan Headquarters, who was appointed Member of our Military Council.

The group spent some time with us, investigating the state of the troops, the Front and Army logistical services (many of which had still not reached the deployment areas), and tactical and strategic problems. I set forth my ideas concerning the organisation of the defence of the Kursk Bulge. The comrades suggested that I should outline them in a memorandum addressed to the Supreme Commander, which I did. The memorandum presented a brief review of the situation on the southern wing of the Soviet-German front as a result of the winter campaign of 1942-43 and certain suggestions for the summer. The most likely sector where the enemy might attempt to mount his decisive summer offensive was the Kursk Bulge. Here he would try, with greater forces, to achieve the objectives he had failed to

achieve in winter. That the enemy was continuing to move troops to the Orel and Belgorod areas revealed his intention to exploit his position outflanking the troops we had inside the salient. The memo stressed the vital necessity of building up powerful GHQ Reserve to the east of the Kursk Bulge: they would help us to resist any enemy blow on this sector.

Since several fronts would take part in the forthcoming campaign, I dwelt upon certain questions of leadership.

I do not claim that my memorandum had any effect; perhaps the overall situation on the fronts itself called for special attention to the Kursk Bulge. Be that as it may, but in May and June of 1943 a new army group, the Reserve Front, was organised in the rear of the Central and Voronezh Fronts. Apparently our suggestion concerning the creation of reliable reserves behind the Kursk Bulge was, after all, taken into account.

THE END OF THE "CITADEL"

In April, the forces on both sides of the Kursk Bulge began to intensify preparations for the summer campaign.

Our CP was located in Yelets, a major railway junction, which naturally attracted the enemy's attention and was subjected to frequent air raids. For this reason alone the location was unsuitable, and in the new situation it had to be moved closer to the troops. Our choice fell on the village of Svoboda, north of Kursk. By the time the staff had prepared the new CP, liaison and communications had been established with all the armies and large units, as well as with the neighbouring fronts on the right and left.

From the character of the enemy's activities, supplemented by intelligence data, we surmised that, if the nazi armies were at all capable of launching an offensive with decisive objectives in the near future, it would be undertaken on the Kursk Bulge. The configuration of the frontline was conducive to the employment of the German Command's favourite stratagem of striking in converging directions at the base of a salient (towards Kursk in the present case). In the event of success, the enemy would envelop the Central and Voronezh Fronts, surrounding the seven armies defending the salient. The continued flow of enemy troops, especially armour and artillery, from depth into the Orel salient confirmed us in our assumptions.

As we subsequently discovered from captured documents, in planning the 1943 operations the German Command had set itself the primary task of routing Soviet troops defending the Kursk Bulge. The importance it attached to the operation, which received the code name "Citadel", can be seen from an order of Hitler dated April 15, 1943: "I have decided, as soon as weather permits, to carry out the first offensive of the year, Operation Citadel. This offensive is of decisive importance. It must give us the initiative for the spring and summer."

Not all the German generals, however, believed in the success of an offensive at Kursk. At a conference with Hitler on May 4, 1943, Colonel-General Model, Commander of the 9th Army, declared: "The enemy expects our offensive, therefore to achieve success different tactics should be adopted, or, better still, the offensive should be abandoned altogether." Similar doubts were voiced by the commanders of the Army Groups South and Centre, Field-Marshals von Manstein and von Kluge.

Nevertheless, the nazi command, eager to bolster Germany's tottering prestige and prevent the disintegration of the fascist bloc, and mindful of the absence of a second front in Europe, finally decided, after lengthy preparations and repeated postponements, to launch an offensive at Kursk.

The Soviet Command had managed correctly to surmise the enemy's plans, the likely directions of his main efforts, and even the deadlines of the offensive. GHQ decided on holding operations with the objective of sapping the strength of the enemy's strike forces and then counterattacking along the whole southern sector of the front from Smolensk to Taganrog. I cannot refrain from mentioning that at the discussion of the forthcoming operation at a GHQ conference attended by Front Commanders some advocated not waiting for the enemy to attack but, on the contrary, launching a pre-emptive attack. GHQ was right to reject these views.

In accordance with the GHQ decision the Central and Voronezh Fronts were instructed to organise strong defences.

We on the Central Front saw our main danger point at the base of the Orel salient on our right wing. We therefore decided to tighten up our defences on that sector, and also deployed the bulk of the Front reserve there.

The considerations underlying these decisions were as follows. The direction of advance that best suited the enemy's purpose was from Orel on Kursk; here it was that the main effort (directed southward or southeastward) could be expected. An enemy strike in any other direction would create no special threat, as the troops and reinforcing means of the Front deployed at the base of the Orel salient could easily be rushed in to bolster the threatened sector. At the very worst, such an offensive would result in our troops being pushed out of the Kursk Bulge without encirclement or total defeat.

The Supreme Commander endorsed the Central Front Command's strategy, and we got down to the work of organising the defence.

Holding the line against the enemy's Orel group overhanging our right flank were units of the 48th, 13th, and 70th Armies on a 132-km front from Gorodishche to Bryantsevo. To the left, the 65th and 60th Armies held a 174-km front from Bryantsevo to Korneyevo.

As usual, I decided to set aside the reserves essential in any situation. The 2nd Tank Army was therefore withdrawn to the second echelon, and the 9th and 19th Tank Corps and the 17th Guards Infantry Corps were placed in the Front reserve, the latter being kept ready to deploy in the 13th Army's zone if the need arose.

We did everything to pack our troops as tightly as possible on the threatened direction, concentrating on a frontage of 95 kilometres 58 per cent of our infantry divisions, 70 per cent of our artillery and 87 per cent of our tanks and self-propelled guns. Forces of the second echelon and Front reserve (a tank army and two separate tank corps) were also deployed on this sector. The remaining 211 kilometres of frontage were manned by less than half our infantry, one-third of our artillery and less than one-fifth of our armour. This was, of course, a risk, but a calculated one founded on our assurance that the enemy would resort to his pet tactics and deliver the main effort at the base of the salient. Front reconnaissance data and reports from partisans confirmed that a powerful concentration of enemy troops was building up on the very sector from which we anticipated his strike.

The overall plan of defensive operations was drawn up with the participation of the Army Commanders, Lieutenant-General P. L. Romanenko of the 48th, Lieutenant-General N. P. Pukhov of the 13th, Lieutenant-General I. V. Galanin, who had replaced the former commander of the 70th, Lieutenant-General P. I. Batov of the 65th, Lieutenant-General I. D. Chernyakhovsky of the 60th, Lieutenant-General A. G. Rodin of the 2nd Tank, and Lieutenant-General S. I. Rudenko of the 16th Air. After the plan was endorsed we got down to work on the terrain, in which the Front Command, Political Department, army commanders, arm and service chiefs and logistics chief took part.

Having in mind that the enemy would attack with large forces, the Front Command issued orders and directives as early as the end of March, with specific instructions concern-

ing the organisation of the defence lines. Major-General A. M. Proshlyakov, Front Chief of Engineers, drew up a detailed timetable and did much to ensure that the works were carried out on schedule and up to standard. We could fully rely on this man's energy and initiative. Modest, even shy, he could, when the need arose, display willpower and unswerving resolve. Profound knowledge and extensive experience enabled him to cope with the most difficult tasks. A solicitous and exacting commander and fine comrade, he enjoyed universal affection. Working with him was a pleasure.

Planned preparations for the defence of the Kursk Bulge began in April and continued right up to the enemy offensive. The troops built the fortified positions of the main line themselves. The second and third lines of the defence, as well as the Army and Front rear echelons, were built by the local population alongside the troops.

In organising this work we made full use of accumulated experience. All the orders and directives of the Front Command called for the creation of a strong, deeply echeloned field defence with many lines and maximum development of the system of fortifications throughout the tactical depth. At first the intention was to build five lines of defence to a total depth of 120-130 km, but subsequently on some of the most important sectors and directions the depth was increased to 150-190 km.

Within three months the Front organised six main defence lines plus intermediary lines and switch positions covering hundreds of kilometres. Communication trenches were built to serve as switch positions if the need arose. Battalion centres of resistance were as a rule prepared for all-round defence.

Special attention was given to boundary protection, artillery and troop manoeuvre in breadth and depth.

In the period from April to June, the troops of the Front dug a total of 5,000 kilometres of trenches and planted 400,000 mines and ground bombs. In the zone of the 13th and 70th Armies alone, 112 kilometres of barbed-wire entanglements were set up, 10.7 kilometres of them electrified, and more than 170,000 mines were planted.

We were aware that in preparing for the summer offensive the German Command placed special hopes on mass panzer strikes, and we accordingly organised the defence of the Kursk Bulge primarily as an antitank system equipped to

repel concentrated armour attacks. We also took into account the enemy's intention to throw his new, heavy Tiger panzers and Ferdinand self-propelled guns into the fighting and prepared antitank lines with powerful strong points on the most dangerous sectors and saturated them with artillery.

It was decided that all of the Front artillery, including anti-aircraft, would be mobilised against the enemy armour, and that it should concentrate its main forces in the defence sectors of the 13th and, in part, 48th and 70th Armies, where we expected the enemy to deliver his main effort.

For better co-ordination and control, the strong points were merged into antitank areas. By July the antitank defences reached 30-35 km in depth on the Front's right wing. In the 13th Army sector, there were 13 antitank areas incorporating 44 strong points in the main line of defence; 9 areas with 34 strong points in the second line; and 15 areas with 60 antitank strong points in the third line.

Much attention was given to antitank obstacles of all kinds. Continuous zones of such obstacles were created on tank threatened directions both in front of the forward line and in the depth of the defence. They included minefields, antitank ditches, dragon's teeth, dams for flooding the terrain, and abatises in wooded areas.

Although regulations did not provide for rocket launchers being used against tanks, it was decided that they should be. Launcher crews carried out target practices with dummy tanks designed to determine the most effective means of combating mass armour attacks.

To meet the eventuality of tanks driving a wedge into our defences we created mobile obstacle detachments whose task would be to plant mines and ground bombs and set up obstacles in the path of enemy tanks during the actual course of battle. In the divisions these detachments comprised one or two engineer companies, in the armies they constituted engineering battalions reinforced with submachine-gunners. They were assigned their probable operational areas in advance.

In addition to these mobile detachments, antitank artillery reserves were established in the divisions, armies and on the scale of the Front. My reserve included three antitank artillery brigades and two antitank regiments.

Special attention was given to organising the system of fire. Fire means were echeloned throughout the depth of each army, with provisions for fire manoeuvre and concen-

tration on threatened sectors. A ramified network of observation posts with reliable communications was set up to facilitate fire control.

In organising the battle formations of the company defence areas we were guided mainly by the need to set up an impenetrable curtain of fire. Depending on the terrain, the companies were staggered, so as to keep the whole battalion area under fire and deliver flank and slant fire. In most of the battalions barrage fire and concentrated heavy machine-gun fire was provided for both in front of the forward lines and in the depth of battalion and regimental areas and sectors. Mortar companies got the range of specified sectors and lines in advance. Antitank-rifle crews were deployed in platoons or sections on tank threatened directions.

The small-arms fire system in the second and rear defence echelons was organised along similar lines, and wherever troops were stationed fire concentration was hardly less than on the main line of defence. In the rear echelon of the 13th Army fire density was even greater than on the main line.

We deployed powerful artillery groups on all the enemy's probable lines of advance. Our overall artillery density amounted to 35 tubes, including more than 10 antitank guns, per kilometre of frontage, and in the 13th Army's zone the density was substantially higher.

Along with the defence works, the troops engaged in extensive combat training, at least one-third of all training time being in night conditions. The staffs, too, were busy training on a round-the-clock schedule.

The enemy intended to throw his heavy Tiger tanks, which were protected by thick armour and armed with an 88-mm gun, into the fighting. Our officers and men studied the characteristics of these machines and mastered the methods of combating them. Every army had ranges for practice fire against tank targets. The crews of infantry 45-mm guns learned to fire at tank tracks at close range. Such regular practice helped the gunners to improve their skills. Their combat readiness was checked at the actual firing positions. The officer assigned for this would arrive at the artillery commander's CP and, in accordance with the defence plan, indicate an area in which the enemy was alleged to have appeared. Targets were picked within the nazi's positions, and in a few moments they were usually hit with pinpoint accuracy. I personally made many such

inspections and I could see for myself that the gunners were well aware of their part in the forthcoming fighting and taking their training seriously.

Credit for preparing the artillery and organising the system of fire must primarily be given to General V. I. Kazakov, our Front Artillery Chief.

The Front Political Department under Major-General S. F. Galadzhev carried out a tremendous amount of work to weld the units into close-knit collectives and step up the activity of Party and Komsomol organisations. The purpose of this work was to keep up high morale, founded on the boundless devotion of our men to the country and the cause of the Communist Party. Political workers, Communists and Komsomols led the men in combat training, fostering stamina, a sense of mutual assistance, and good care for the arms and equipment placed in their hands.

We kept a watchful eye on the quality of the fortifications and the organisation of antitank defence on the main sectors. I visited the troops repeatedly to inspect the fortifications and speak with the men. I was gratified to see that the officers and men were confident of themselves and the strength of the defences they had built. They had accumulated much valuable experience in the fighting on these lines in February and March, when they had successfully repelled the enemy's attacks. Inspecting the defences in the neighbourhood of Ponyri, I asked the men of one unit what they thought of the positions. They unanimously assured me that on their sector the enemy would not pass. (And they kept their word: all the enemy's attempts to break through at Ponyri failed.)

When reviewing the 60th Army, which had been handed over to us from the Voronezh Front, I met General I. D. Chernyakhovsky. He was a fine commander, young, educated, cheerful—altogether a remarkable man and very popular with the troops. Such things are readily apparent. When an officer comes up to his Army Commander and delivers his reports with cheerful confidence, this is the commander's achievement. Officers of all grades are acutely sensitive to the attitude of senior officers, and it should be the desire of every one of us to create an atmosphere in which our subordinates carry out orders with genuine willingness. Like P. I. Batov, the 65th Army Commander, Chernyakhovsky had achieved this.

I had the feeling that anyone should find it easy to work

with General Chernyakhovsky, but A. I. Zaporozhets, Member of the Army Military Council, seemed unable to find common ground with him. He was a prominent figure, an old Bolshevik and Civil War hero with a fine combat record. But times had changed, and the army had also changed, while he continued to live and work in the past. The result was clashes with the young and rapidly ascending Army Commander. K. F. Telegin and I did our best to bring the two men together, but nothing came of it. They were much too different, and I reported as much to the Supreme Commander. Stalin listened to me, reflected for a moment and then agreed that they should be separated. Two days later Zaporozhets was recalled to Moscow.

The tenseness of the situation and expectation of fierce fighting naturally aroused feelings of foreboding in the Kursk regional authorities, who suggested that the population be evacuated from the bulge. Although they were motivated by the desire to avoid causing unnecessary hardship to people who had already suffered so much and had only recently been saved from nazi servitude, we could not agree to this step. Evacuation of the civilian population would have had an adverse effect on troop morale. The men were busy building fortifications and preparing to defend our gains at all costs. Everything was done to remove the slightest suggestion of any possibility of retreat. The CP, headquarters and command and service units were located at the very centre of the salient. We took all necessary measures to concentrate there all the reserves that might be required for a protracted engagement. Even if the enemy succeeded in cutting us off, we would still be able to hold the salient. The population had faith in us, and there was no thought of evacuation. GHQ supported our stand. To the credit of the civilian authorities, they quickly realised that we were right and all suggestions of evacuation were dropped.

Much later I was asked how we could have been so sure that we would repulse the enemy. This assurance had rested on a firm basis. Our commanders had matured and acquired tremendous combat experience. Our men had learned to fight and to win. The country was providing us with large quantities of up-to-date arms and materiel. Important changes had taken place in troop organisation. Large artillery units—divisions and corps—organised as GHQ Reserve made it possible to concentrate great masses of artil-

lery on the required sectors (also facilitated by the introduction of mechanical traction). Our Air Force was stronger and equipped with the most modern aircraft. There was certainly no enemy force capable of overwhelming us now!

We also received much help from the partisans of Bryansk area and Byelorussia. I knew many of their commanders personally, notably from meetings in the summer of 1942 at the Bryansk Front CP in the neighbourhood of Yefremov. After a conference in Moscow, the leaders of partisan detachments and large units had visited us to discuss problems of co-operation with the Front Command. They had been shown new types of weapons manufactured specially for partisan warfare. Among those present had been V. I. Kozlov, S. A. Kovpak, A. N. Saburov and others. We had ferried them all safely over the frontline to the partisan areas. Our friendship had been greatly cemented in those days, and now it helped us in organising co-ordination between the regular troops and the partisans. We kept in constant contact with their headquarters, from which we received information on enemy troop movements. Our air reconnaissance observations were double-checked and augmented by the partisans, and our aircraft bombed targets which they located. For our part, we helped the partisans as best we could with arms, ammunition and medical supplies and evacuated the wounded to the rear.

Thanks to continuous observation of the enemy, the Front HQ was in possession of exhaustive data indicating that he was assembling large forces in the Orel salient. At the same time, reports from Voronezh Front HQ informed us that German troops were being concentrated in the Kharkov-Belgorod area. There seemed to be no doubt that our original assumptions were correct. The enemy was preparing an offensive operation against the Kursk Bulge providing for a double pincer drive from the Orel and Belgorod sectors.

In May and June the German air force stepped up activities considerably, striking at railway junctions, stations and bridges to prevent us from bringing up troops, materiel, ammunition and fuel to the front. Night raids were carried out by groups of 20-25 aircraft against objectives in the rear. Day raids by small groups of bombers protected by fighters or lone bombers were directed against targets in the forward echelons.

The task of combating enemy aircraft was assigned to General Rudenko's 16th Air Army, now redeployed around

Kursk, units of the Anti-Aircraft Defence, and Front and Army AA artillery. A stubborn struggle for superiority in the air ensued.

The enemy persistently attempted to disrupt our supplies, which greatly complicated the already difficult tasks of the Front logistical services. Luckily, Major-General N. A. Antipenko, our Logistics Chief, was an able organiser and a man of exceptional energy. His remarkably well-knit staff coped successfully with all hardships. Every means was used to get supplies through on time: new roads were laid; horses were used to shunt wagons on damaged railway sidings that could not hold locomotives; lorries and carts were on the move day and night. The railway workers of the Kursk junction performed feats of heroism, repairing damage caused by enemy air raids under falling bombs. In general, the people of Kursk gave tremendous help in liquidating air-raid damage, and building detour roads and fortifications; the workers set up tank, automobile and artillery repair shops; thousands joined the army. Even so we remained short of manpower, and once again we took a slice out of the service personnel of logistical units. From hospitals and medical battalions came wounded men, who could hardly wait to convalesce before rejoining their units.

By summer we succeeded in building up our infantry divisions to a strength of 4,500-5,000 effectives each, and three or four had as many as 6,000-7,000 men. At the same time we had reliable information that the strength of enemy infantry divisions facing us reached 10,000-12,000 each, with motorised divisions 14,000-strong and a panzer division 15,000-16,000-strong. In spite of the heavy losses suffered that winter the Hitler command had managed to replace their troops to a substantial degree.

The second half of June saw a stepping up of aircraft sorties on both sides with dogfights hardly ceasing overhead. On some days as many as a hundred aircraft simultaneously filled a relatively small sector of the sky. From our CP we were able to watch some really breath-taking air battles.

Then we noticed that enemy reconnaissance aircraft began to appear more frequently over the village in which our CP was located. We lived in peasant houses with shelter slits dug in the yards for protection against fragments and bullets. That we failed to provide dugouts was a great blunder. The house I occupied stood opposite the gate of an old monastery park, close by stood two tall poplars. In

other words the house provided a noticeable target, if there ever was one. We realised this only after the German planes began to frequent us. We decided to shift our quarters, but never seemed able to get around to it.

As a rule I spent the latter part of the evening going through the paper routine, after which I had supper in the Military Council mess next door. One evening for some reason or other, instead of waiting for the cipher clerk as I usually did, I asked him to bring the decoded messages over to me at the mess. I was joined there shortly by Kazakov, Malinin, Telegin and several other staff officers. At exactly 2300 hrs the cipher clerk brought me the messages. And at the same time a German plane flew over and dropped several flares; then we heard the droning of another plane, followed by the scream of falling bombs. I could only shout, "Down!" We all dropped to the floor, and a deafening blast shook the ground. Plaster crumbled from the walls, filling the room with dust, windows flew out with a crash. The first blast was followed by a second one, a little way off. No one was hurt. But when we went out we found that my house had been flattened by that second bomb. Had anyone been there he would never have survived. I had been saved by mere chance, or perhaps, intuition. In short, anything can happen in war.

The casualties of the raid were a sentry at my house, killed by the blast, and a second sentry and junior A.D.C. wounded in a slit.

General Oryol arrived, spreading his arms and shaking his head wonderingly. He had seen the flares and gone out to his shelter slit, but, growing impatient, had soon returned to the house. At that moment a bomb had struck the slit in which he had been sitting square in the middle.

"What made you leave the slit?" someone asked.

Oryol laughed. "I felt so cramped and cold there, as though I'd been laid in a grave and they were going to bury me. So I decided that if I had to be killed it might as well be in a warm, cosy room. . . ."

This was all very well, of course, but we had no right to run such risks. The situation was too complex by now for us to move the CP, so we decided to dig into the ground. The Chief of Staff, Malinin, and the Front Chief of Engineers, Proshlyakov, saw to it that several excellent dugouts were swiftly built in the former monastery park, and we moved into them at once.

Meanwhile the clouds continued to gather. Towards the end of June we began to receive information of large movements of enemy armour, artillery and infantry into the forward area. Our artillery and air reconnaissance kept spotting new artillery positions and panzer concentrations in gullies and copses close to the forward line.

On July 2, GHQ alerted us to the possibility of the enemy's launching an offensive at any moment. This was the third such warning, the two previous ones having been issued on the 2nd and 20th of May.

On the night of July 4, several German sappers were captured in the 13th and 48th Army zones, where they had been demining minefields. They declared that the offensive was scheduled to start at 0300 hrs and German forces had already occupied the line of departure.

There was little more than one hour left. Could we trust the prisoners' information? If they were speaking the truth, then it was time to open up the planned counterpreparation fire, for which we had assigned half our total artillery and mortar units of fire.

There was no time to contact GHQ, a delay could lead to grave consequences indeed. General Zhukov, who had arrived as GHQ representative on the previous evening, gave me a free hand to act as I saw fit—quite rightly, I think, and I ordered the Front Chief of Artillery to open fire at once.

At 0220 hrs, July 5, the roar of guns shattered the predawn silence reigning over the steppe and the positions of the opposing armies south of Orel.

As it turned out, on the 13th Army's sector and part of the 48th Army's, where the enemy's main effort had been expected, we had anticipated his artillery preparation by just ten minutes. The fire of more than 500 guns, 460 mortars and 100 M-13 rocket launchers smote the enemy's troops poised for the attack, inflicting heavy losses, especially in artillery, and disrupting his system of troop control.

The nazis were taken completely by surprise and decided that *we* were launching an offensive. This naturally upset their plans and caused confusion in the ranks. It took the enemy a good two hours to marshal his troops, and it was only 0430 hrs when the artillery preparation finally began —at reduced strength and in considerable disorder.

At 0530, the German Orel group attacked along the whole front of the 13th Army and on the right flank of the 70th

Army, the main effort being restricted to a very narrow frontage. In the course of the first day he threw in large forces of tanks, including the much-vaunted Tigers and Ferdinand self-propelled mounts.

The attack was supported by powerful artillery fire and air strikes, with as many as 300 bombers operating in groups of 50 to 100 pounding the whole tactical depth of our defences, artillery positions especially. Fierce fighting flared up in the Olkhovatka sector, in the zone of the 81st and 15th Infantry Divisions of the 13th Army, where the main attack was being delivered by three infantry and two panzer divisions supported by large numbers of aircraft. Infantry in armoured carriers and on foot followed the panzer battle formations, moving swiftly forward under cover of the armour.

To all appearances the German Command counted on a repetition of the offensive it had carried out in the summer of 1942 from the region of Kursk in the direction of Voronezh. But times had changed, and his error of judgment cost him dear.

Our artillery, mortars, rocket launchers and machine-guns met the enemy with a hail of fire. Antitank guns and rifles hit out point-blank at the enemy panzers. Our air force engaged the enemy in the air and on the ground.

Fierce fighting ensued. Enemy panzers lumbered into our minefields and were crippled one after another. Machines following in their wake pulled the wreck aside and continued to negotiate the mined sectors of our defences. The Tigers and Ferdinands gave fire protection to medium tanks and infantry.

Battered by this steel torrent, our troops fought gallantly, using all means at their disposal to hit back. Our infantry had 45-mm guns, which were incapable of piercing the Tigers' armour, so they fired at close range at the tracks. Scorning the heavy fire, engineers and infantrymen crawled up to stalled enemy machines, placed mines under them and pelted them with hand grenades and incendiary bottles. At the same time our infantry units pinned down the men following the panzers on foot with fire and then wiped them out with counterattacks. The 13th Army successfully repulsed four fierce attacks. But the fifth time, after throwing in fresh forces, the enemy succeeded in breaking into the positions of the 81st and 15th Infantry Divisions. It was time to support these two units from the air. I ordered the Commander

of the 16th Air Army to strike at the enemy forces that were breaking through. General Rudenko sent up more than 200 fighters and 150 bombers. Their attacks slowed down the enemy advance on this sector, which enabled us to throw the 17th Infantry Corps, two antitank brigades and one mortar brigade into the breach. These forces managed to halt the enemy advance.

Although the enemy had struck with tremendous force, on the first day he succeeded in penetrating no more than 6 to 8 kilometres inside our defences.

From data at our disposal we judged that the German Command had not yet committed all the forces of his main grouping to action, and we could expect new powerful blows on the following day. On the night of July 5, I reported the situation to GHQ. The Supreme Commander told me that the Front was being reinforced with Lieutenant-General S. T. Trofimenko's 27th Army, taken from the reserve. This was good news indeed, and I sent several staff officers out to meet the Army. However, our joy was short-lived and next morning we received new orders: in view of the threatening situation in the neighbourhood of Oboyan the 27th Army was to proceed to the Voronezh Front. GHQ went on to say that we could count only on our own forces, adding that we were assigned the additional task of defending Kursk in the event of an enemy breakthrough on the Voronezh Front in the south.

"Your neighbour on the left is in a grave situation," Stalin said, "and the enemy may strike at your rear from there."

I had urgently to devise means of strengthening this sector. The only thing to do was to concentrate forces on the threatened direction at the cost of weakening the armies holding the snout of the Kursk Bulge. I ordered General Chernyakhovsky, the 60th Army Commander, to dispatch a reserve division of his to the Front reserve. Front transport services helped redeploy the division with all its materiel within twenty-four hours. From the Front reserve the 9th Tank Corps moved into the Kursk area.

I ordered two tank regiments to be taken from the 65th Army to strengthen the boundary between the 13th and 70th Armies. At first General Batov, the 65th Army Commander, objected to this, claiming that without these regiments he would be unable to halt the enemy in the event of an attack. I asked what he thought would be more dangerous for his Army: a frontal enemy attack or envelop-

ment? After that he withdrew his objections and the tank regiments were speedily transferred to the new sector.

The direction of the enemy's main attack became clearly apparent in the very first day of the fighting, and it was not along the railway, as provided for by the second variant of our defence plans, but more to the west, towards Olkhovatka.

I had to give up the idea of manoeuvring the Front reserve, as there would have been no time left for this, and instead I decided to deliver a swift, short, but powerful counterblow at the enemy forces wedged into our defences, using the 17th Guards Infantry and 16th Tank Corps.

Our artillery and aircraft struck at dawn on July 6. The counterattack began. Troops of the 17th Corps advanced two kilometres, where they were joined by elements of the 15th and 81st Divisions which had been fighting in encirclement for the second day. Holding out on various sectors were two battalions, seven companies, eleven platoons and a number of smaller groups headed by officers. Occupying advantageous positions, they did not falter when enveloped by enemy panzers. On the contrary, by striking from the rear these brave men forced them to slow down their advance. The nazis threw large forces against them, but they stood firm, repelling panzer and infantry attacks and greatly helping our counterattacking troops, which reached them in time. Now these officers and men joined the advancing units and forged ahead.

However, our attack was soon checked. The enemy brought up fresh forces and fell upon the 17th Corps' positions with 250 panzers and large forces of infantry. Fighting back stubbornly, our troops retreated to their line of departure. An enemy attempt to break into the second line of defence on the heels of the retreating troops was repelled. In view of the enemy's superiority in tanks, especially heavy ones, our troops were ordered to reinforce their lines with tanks dug in to carry on fire from stationary positions. It was permitted to use tanks for counterattacks only against infantry or light enemy armour, and then only after his battle formations had been disarrayed by fire.

This order had been prompted by circumstances. I remembered only too well the time when our tankmen had hastily launched a head-on attack against Tigers. They had suffered substantial casualties and been hurled back behind the infantry lines. The situation then had been saved by

our artillery, which had stopped the enemy with well-aimed direct fire.

Although the counterattack undertaken by the 17th Infantry Corps had not lived up to expectations, it had prevented the enemy from advancing in the Olkhovatka direction. This it was that had decided the fate of the German Orel group's offensive. We had gained time to concentrate the necessary forces and materiel on the most threatened sector.

Having failed to achieve success on July 6 in the centre and on the left flank of the 13th Army, in the morning of July 7 the enemy shifted his main effort to Ponyri, a powerful stronghold of ours from which we could deliver flank attacks against the enemy forces advancing on Olkhovatka.

The German Command had been quick to realise the importance of this stronghold and had decided to neutralise it at all costs so as to facilitate his southward advance. But we discerned his intention in good time and brought up troops from other sectors.

To strengthen the antitank defences of Ponyri and give artillery support to the units of Major-General M. A. Yenshin's 307th Infantry Division fighting there, we brought up the 5th Artillery Assault Division and the 13th Antitank, 11th Mortar and 22nd Guards Rocket-Launcher Brigades, all reinforced with units of the 1st Guards Engineers Brigade. Under cover of night they occupied positions in the zone of the 307th Division.

The enemy began his attack on Ponyri at dawn on July 7. The earth shook under the impact of thousands of bombs and shells, the roar of artillery, the revving of tank engines and the clang of steel tracks.

Our gunners fought bravely, repelling wave after wave of panzer attacks. The commanders kept effective control over their units. In this battle the artillerymen displayed the greatest fortitude and tremendous skill. Thousands of men and line and political officers distinguished themselves in the fighting: I can hardly find adequate words to describe their courage and heroism. It was against their staunchness that this hurricane of steel proved impotent. The artillerymen turned the vaunted Tigers and Ferdinands into piles of so much twisted and gutted scrap-iron. With their help the gallantly fighting regiments of the 307th Division beat back five enemy attacks.

Fighting side by side with the artillery and infantry, the engineers, too, helped repel the enemy attacks. They had

done excellent work in setting up the defences, and now they fought with distinction to repulse the offensive. The remote-controlled minefields and ground bombs they had planted on the main tank threatened directions went up under enemy panzers. On many sectors the path of the enemy armour was barred by mobile detachments of engineers.

Our aircraft operated in close co-ordination with the ground forces. Air reconnaissance and ground observers discovered that the enemy was concentrating some 150 panzers and a considerable amount of motorised infantry in a gully at Ponyri in preparation for a new attack. We pounded the place with artillery, and Rudenko sent in 120 attack and bomber aircraft. The enemy suffered tremendous losses and his attack was foiled.

In the second half of the day nazi aircraft appeared over the battlefield and proceeded to bomb our troops intensively. The enemy redoubled his efforts and, at the cost of heavy casualties, succeeded in advancing slightly on some sectors; two battalions supported by 50 tanks even broke into the northern outskirts of Ponyri. This, however, was but a temporary success. Our troops counterattacked, both battalions were routed and the situation was restored.

In spite of heavy casualties the enemy continued to attack and evening brought no respite. The nazi command threw two more infantry regiments and 60 Tigers into the fighting at Ponyri, and these succeeded in pushing back the 307th Division a little. Having regrouped during the night, however, the division counterattacked next morning and regained its former positions, inflicting severe casualties on the enemy. Ponyri remained in our hands.

Fighting continued all through July 7 and 8 on the Olkhovatka sector as well. Supported by armour, enemy infantry clawed at our defences incessantly, but the units of the 17th Guards Infantry Corps, the 2nd Tank Army and the Front artillery and aircraft repelled his onslaught, displaying fortitude and performing feats of mass heroism..

By the end of the third day almost all the Front reserve had been committed to action, yet the enemy continued to bring in new forces on the main line of attack. He might well commit all he had to the effort, even venturing to weaken his forces on inactive sectors of the front. What could we do to hold out against him? I decided on a calcu-

lated risk and sent my last reserve—General S. I. Bogdanov's 9th Tank Corps which was protecting Kursk from the south—against the main attack. This was a fully manned formation, our pride and hope.

I fully realised what dire consequences could result from this manoeuvre in the event of failure. For cracks had begun to appear in our neighbour's front, and we could always expect an enemy strike from there, from the south. But, after all, we had sent Vatutin our 27th Army. I was also mindful that behind the neighbour's forces stood the Reserve Front, and GHQ could come to Vatutin's aid in case of an emergency.

On the night of July 7, the 9th Tank Corps was deployed on the main sector.

On July 8 at 0820 hrs up to 300 enemy panzers, supported by artillery and mortar fire and air strikes, attacked our positions at the boundary of the 13th and 70th Armies northwest of Olkhovatka, penetrating the infantry battle formations. The 3rd Artillery Antitank Brigade of Colonel Rukosuyev was rushed to the scene and managed to take up positions in the nick of time. The gunners met the nazis with a barrage of direct fire.

I will cite only one example to illustrate the intensity of this battle. Nearly thirty tanks were advancing on a battery commanded by Captain G. I. Igishev. The gunners engaged them in unequal combat. Their four guns let the enemy approach to within 600-700 metres before opening fire. They destroyed 17 tanks, but by this time only one gun was left of the battery, with three men to serve it. They continued to fire, putting two more heavy tanks out of action. The enemy was forced to retire. Thanks to the heroic combined operations by all arms the attack was repulsed. In the second half of the day tanks of the 9th Tank Corps joined the fighting.

Enemy attacks had been successfully repelled on other sectors of the front as well.

The enemy had also been active along the whole of our right wing, attacking at the boundary of the 48th and 13th Armies, but here too he had failed to achieve any success. The enemy onslaught began to weaken perceptibly. By July 11, his troops, having suffered heavy losses and achieved none of their objectives, discontinued their attacks. In six days of continuous fighting they had succeeded in penetrating our defences by only 6 to 12 kilometres.

The troops of the Central Front had fulfilled their task. They had worn down the enemy's forces with their stubborn resistance and broken his offensive. The northern nazi group attacking from the Orel salient with eight infantry, six panzer and one motorised divisions supported by 3,500 guns and more than 1,000 planes had been unable to break through towards the group battering at the southern shoulder of the Kursk Bulge.

Our neighbour on the left, the Voronezh Front, had also halted the enemy, who had managed to advance there up to 35 kilometres. Vatutin had been greatly assisted by the GHQ Reserve. His troops had been continuously reinforced with units from the Reserve Front and subsequently this Reserve Front (by then renamed the Steppe Front) attacked and threw the enemy back to his initial positions.

We had got along without the GHQ Reserve, managing with our own forces. Some memoir writers and historians attribute this to the fact that the enemy's northern group, facing us, had been much weaker than the southern group, which had attacked Vatutin's troops. However, the difference between the two groups had not been all that great: the southern group had been superior to the northern by two panzer divisions, but inferior by three infantry divisions. Obviously, the reason lies elsewhere: namely, the Central Front had deployed its forces better, concentrating them on the most threatened sector, and the enemy had been unable to overcome such a concentration of forces and materiel. The Voronezh Front had taken a different approach to the defence problem, spreading its forces almost uniformly over the whole frontage. That, as I see it, was why the enemy, striking as he did against us, on a narrow sector, succeeded in penetrating comparatively deeply, so that substantial forces from GHQ Reserve were needed to bring him to a halt.

Speaking of the defensive fighting carried on by troops of the Central Front on the Kursk Bulge, I should like to emphasise certain characteristic features. First of all, the role of the GHQ representative. Zhukov spent quite a long time at the Central Front in the preparatory period, and we jointly decided questions of principle pertaining to the organisation and conduct of defensive action and the counteroffensive. Thanks to him many of our requests addressed to Moscow were met. He revisited our headquarters on the eve of the campaign, made a thorough review of the situa-

tion and in the morning of July 5, at the height of the fighting, reported to Stalin that the Front Commander was firmly in control of his troops and fully capable of carrying out his tasks on his own. Zhukov then requested permission to leave, and left at once.

I think that by then Zhukov also realised that it was much more useful for him, as first deputy of the Supreme Commander, to be at GHQ, where the overall leadership of hostilities on land and at sea was centred, than at any single sector where one might, willy-nilly, be influenced by the locally developing situation.

All through the fighting our HQ maintained close contact with the General Staff, keeping them posted on the situation at the front.

The battle of the Kursk Bulge made me reflect once again on the place of the commander. Many top-ranking generals held the view that the Army or Front Commander who spent most of the time at the CP, in his headquarters, was not up to the mark. This is a view that I cannot accept. As I see it, there is only one rule: the commander's place is where he finds it better to control his troops.

All through the defensive campaign, from beginning to end, I had never left my CP. There I could constantly feel the development of events at the front, keep my finger on the pulse of the battle and react promptly to changes in the situation.

I consider that as a rule visits to the troops in a complex and highly fluid situation can serve no useful purpose; on the contrary, the Front Commander is liable to lose sight of the overall picture, making it impossible to lead his forces correctly, and this may well lead to defeat. This is not to say, of course, that the commander should in all circumstances sit it out at his headquarters. The commander's presence among the troops can be of tremendous importance—it all depends on the time and situation.

Exploiting their initial success, the 48th, 13th and 70th Armies dealt a swift blow, and by July 12 they had thrown the enemy back to his former positions. The same day the Bryansk Front went on the offensive.

Our Central Front was to start moving its right flank forward on July 15. The GHQ plan involved, in addition to the Bryansk Front, where M. A. Reiter had been replaced

by Colonel-General M. M. Popov, the armies on the left wing of the Western Front, which were to strike southward. On the right wing Central Front forces were to advance northwest towards them, in the direction of Kromy. The Bryansk Front was to deal two blows with the object of splitting the enemy's Orel group and enveloping Orel from the north and south.

The overall object of this operation was thus to split the enemy group and destroy the scattered forces. The plan, however, failed to take into account that our own forces would be thinly stretched. I think it would have been simpler and surer to deliver two main powerful strikes from the north and south at Bryansk, at the base of the Orel salient. But this would have required time for the Western and Central Fronts to regroup. But once again undue haste was displayed—haste, moreover, completely unjustified by the situation. As a result, the attack on the decisive sectors was launched without adequate preparation. Instead of a swift thrust the offensive deteriorated into protracted fighting, and instead of surrounding and destroying the enemy we were, in effect, pushing and jostling him out of the Orel salient. It could have been quite a story had we begun the operation a little later, concentrating our forces in two powerful pincer movements closing at Bryansk.

I also think that little or no account had been taken of the fact that the Germans had been digging in around Orel for over a year and had built a strong, deeply echeloned system of fortifications. The enemy's Orel group had recently been substantially reinforced with units transferred from other sectors of the front and from the West. True, they had suffered heavily in the offensive, but even so they contributed substantially to the defence of the salient. With the aim of boosting army morale, the nazi command had brought the troops of the 2nd Panzer and 9th Armies holding the Orel salient together under the command of Colonel-General Model, who enjoyed the special confidence of Hitler and was regarded as an unsurpassed master of defence, especially after the protracted fighting on the Rzhev-Vyazma sector. This general's Order of the Day announcing his assumption of command fell into our hands. It started with the words, "Soldiers, I am with you!"

The forces of the Central Front advancing on the right flank—that is the selfsame 48th, 13th and 70th Armies, great-

ly weakened in the heavy defensive fighting—made slow progress against the stubborn resistance of the nazis, who ably used their well-fortified lines. They battered through one position after another. The enemy resorted to mobile defence tactics. While some units held the defence others occupied a new line, five to eight kilometres away. Time and again he counterattacked with panzers, which he still possessed in adequate numbers. He also made wide use of manpower and materiel, manoeuvring within the inner lines of his defences.

Units of the Bryansk and Western Fronts were also advancing slowly, unable to breach the enemy's defences in depth. Nor were the 3rd Guards and 4th Tank Armies, transferred from GHQ Reserve, able to achieve a penetration.

One of these—the 3rd Guards Tank Army—was shortly handed over to us to be used in the Kromy direction. A quick review of the Army revealed that it was in a sad state. It had suffered considerable losses and its setbacks had had an adverse effect on morale—which I quickly perceived on the very first day of fighting. The Army Commander was General P. S. Rybalko, whom I had known since 1926, when I had served as an instructor with the Mongolian People's Army and Rybalko had commanded a Separate Cavalry Squadron attached to the Soviet Embassy in Ulan-Bator. He had formerly been a political worker, later assuming a command post after completing a course of training. He was a good commander, firm and resolute, but neither he nor his subordinates had had time to recover after the exhausting fighting on the Bryansk Front. In spite of all their efforts, the tank crews were unable to overcome the enemy's resistance. To prevent unnecessary losses, I requested GHQ to withdraw Rybalko's tank army to the reserve. Subsequently these tankmen became famous for their gallantry during the fighting with the Voronezh Front.

The offensive developed slowly, but still we and our neighbour, the Bryansk Front, advanced doggedly, step by step.

According to information supplied by partisans and confirmed by POW testimony the enemy was still switching formations from other sectors to the Orel zone. He paid particular attention to strengthening his flanks, thereby facilitating the planned withdrawal of the troops defending the snout of the salient.

By the joint efforts of three fronts—the Western and Central striking from the north and south, and the Bryansk advancing from the east—the enemy's Orel group was defeated. On August 5, divisions of the Bryansk Front liberated Orel, and by August 18, troops of the Central Front in co-ordination with the Bryansk Front had driven the nazis out of the whole of the Orel salient and approached the powerful Hagen defence line.

On August 3, the Voronezh Front troops assumed the offensive, and on August 5, they took Belgorod. The liberation of Orel and Belgorod was marked in Moscow in the evening of August 5, by the first artillery salute of the war. The nation paid homage to the troops of the Central, Voronezh, Bryansk, Western and Steppe Fronts who had gallantly carried out their tasks.

At long last the Soviet people and their Armed Forces, led by the Communist Party, had achieved a radical turning point in the war. Our command gained the initiative—never to lose it again. The grim phantom of disaster loomed over Hitler's Reich.

Thanks to the heroic toil of the people, the Soviet Army was now receiving more and more weapons and equipment. The army's organisational structure was being perfected. New cadres of experienced line and political officers had been tempered in the crucible of combat. The people were filled with the desire to hasten the victory over the hated enemy. After the Battle of Kursk the whole nation realised that this hour was approaching.

THRUST ACROSS THE DNIEPER

We received orders to prepare for a new operation. The Central Front was to advance southwest in the direction of Shostka, Bakhmach, Nezhin, Kiev, force the rivers Desna and Dnieper, and, in co-ordination with the Voronezh Front, take Kiev. The boundary with our neighbour passed through Lokinskaya Station, Terny, Krasny Kolyadin, Ichnya, Kiev.

The overall objective of GHQ was to rout the enemy forces on the southern wing of the Soviet-German front, liberate the whole of Left-Bank Ukraine, take a running leap over the Dnieper and capture bridgeheads on its right bank. Implementation of this objective was assigned to the forces of five fronts: Central, Voronezh, Steppe, Southwestern and Southern.

We were given ten days to prepare for the operation, obviously much too short a time. On the other hand, we could not put off the offensive as the enemy would use any delay to reinforce his troops and strengthen his defences. We already had information, confirmed by Byelorussian and Ukrainian partisans, that the nazis were hastily erecting a strong fortified line along the rivers Dnieper and Sozh as part of the so-called Eastern Wall.

We fully realised the difficulty and importance of our task. And our troops had not yet rested after the fierce fighting on the Kursk Bulge, nor replenished their forces. They had to be provided with food, ammunition, fodder and fuel. We brought all depots and bases up as close to the troops as possible. General Antipenko and his logistical staff did everything to ensure that there would be no interruptions in supplies during the offensive. I must say that this energetic man had never let us down before, and we were confident that now too the logistical services would cope with their tasks.

With the experience of the fighting on the Kursk Bulge to go by, the Front Command placed great hopes in

extensive manoeuvring for offensive purposes as well. Since our tasks included forcing such big rivers as the Desna, Sozh and Dnieper, General Proshlyakov, Chief of Engineers, was instructed to build up reserves of river-crossing equipment that would be needed.

After some regrouping, on August 26, the Central Front launched the offensive. The main attack was in the direction of Sevsk and was delivered by troops of the 65th Army and 2nd Tank Army (substantially understrength). Their advance was to be supported by units of the 48th and 60th Armies on the flanks adjoining the strike force. Our neighbour on the left, the Voronezh Front, was to attack together with us, with the object of routing the enemy in the Kharkov area and then advancing on Poltava and Kremenchug and taking bridgeheads on the Dnieper.

General P. I. Batov's 65th Army advancing on the main line of attack was reinforced with the 4th Assault Artillery Corps from the reserve. General S. I. Bogdanov's 2nd Tank Army was committed to action in Batov's zone, and the main forces of the 16th Air Army were to operate there as well.

Partisan reconnaissance provided us with information on enemy defences, many useful details were volunteered by local inhabitants crossing the frontline from enemy-held territory, and we took many aerial photographs of enemy positions. All this information, supported by POW statements, indicated that we were faced with a strong, well-fortified line of defence held by troops of the German 2nd Army. Its forward line passed along the rivers Sev and Seim. All villages were equipped for all-round defence and had been turned into strong points.

We fully realised the difficulties facing us, but even so, the enemy's resistance was stiffer than we had expected. In spite of the hurricane of fire delivered by our artillery and continuous air strikes, the nazis not only refused to leave their positions but on the contrary undertook fierce counter-attacks. Dozens of tanks accompanied by dense lines of submachine-gunners and supported by squadrons of aircraft swarmed towards our troops. The fighting continued without respite on the ground and in the air.

In the morning of August 27, we had to reinforce our infantry with units of the 2nd Tank Army. But the same day the enemy rushed two more infantry and two more panzer divisions to Sevsk. The nazis fought desperately,

heedless of losses. Batov's troops had to fight every inch of the way; but they doggedly continued to advance. By evening the 65th Army, in co-operation with Bogdanov's tankmen, carried Sevsk, but were unable to exploit the success. Enemy counterattacks followed, wave after wave. As we were striking on a comparatively narrow front the enemy had ample opportunity to rush in troops from other sectors. In short, he did exactly what we had done in the defensive fighting on the Kursk Bulge. Some way of depriving him of this possibility had to be found. On the second day of our offensive I ordered General Chernyakhovsky, Commander of the 60th Army, to deliver an auxiliary attack on his left flank, massing as many forces as he could for the operation.

Chernyakhovsky grasped my idea at once. He swiftly concentrated several of his strongest divisions in the strike area, even at the cost of weakening his right flank, and launched the attack. Whereas on the main line of advance our units had succeeded in pushing forward only 20-25 kilometres in four days of bitter fighting, Chernyakhovsky's ably organised blow yielded immediate results. Without encountering any strong enemy opposition, the 60th Army pushed far ahead. Exploiting the initial success, we hastened to reinforce Chernyakhovsky's army from Front reserve, and sent in additional aircraft.

On August 29, the 60th Army carried Glukhov. We had obviously found a weak spot in the enemy's defences, and this had to be exploited without delay. I decided to shift the Front's main effort to the left flank. We quickly carried out a regrouping manoeuvre, transferring the 13th Army from the right flank and throwing it into action on the boundary of the 65th and 60th, and bringing up the 2nd Tank Army as well.

Meanwhile, by the evening of August 31, Chernyakhovsky had advanced 60 kilometres and widened the breach to a hundred kilometres. His troops entered the Ukraine and headed for Konotop.

We mobilised all our motor transport to throw troops and materiel into the breach. Once again useful experience gained in the defensive campaign at Kursk came in. We had learned to manoeuvre our forces quickly, and now we did this better than the enemy. The Germans realised the threat posed by our advance on Konotop and began hastily bringing up reserves. By now, however, it was impossible to halt our onslaught.

I must say that as the war went on the nazi command committed more and more errors of judgment. This time, too, they had failed to grasp the situation until it was too late, and were unable to parry the blow.

Our troops' rapid advance on the Konotop sector contributed to success on the sectors occupied by the 65th Army and, a little later, on those of the 48th. The whole Central Front came into motion. Throwing back the enemy, Batov's army steadily built up the impetus of its advance. Its troops negotiated the Bryansk and Khinelsk forests, and by September 5 carried Seredina-Buda and Khutor Mikhailovsky, having advanced 125 km to the west, taking many prisoners and capturing guns, tanks, weapons and other military equipment.

The 48th Army now advanced in co-operation with the 65th, on its left, and the left flank of the Bryansk Front, on its right.

Ahead lay the Desna, a wide water barrier which the enemy would try to use as a line of defence. He had to be denied it at all costs, so I ordered Batov to accelerate his advance, force the river without halting and, in co-operation with the 48th, capture Novgorod-Seversky.

On the main line of advance, General N. P. Pukhov's 13th Army had also reached the Desna. He was given the task of advancing along the left bank and forcing a crossing south of Chernigov so as then to advance to the Dnieper, storm across it and capture a bridgehead on the western bank at the mouth of the River Teterev near Chernobyl.

In full pursuit of the fleeing enemy, steam-rolling units that attempted to halt its advance, the 60th Army carried Konotop on September 6 and, three days later, Bakhmach. Four enemy infantry divisions were surrounded south of Bakhmach and, after two days of fighting, completely routed. On September 15, after a brief engagement, Chernyakhovsky's forces liberated Nezhin. The road to Kiev was open.

At this time the right-flank armies of our neighbour on the left, the Voronezh Front, were still fighting on the Romny, Lokhvitsa line, some 100-120 kilometres behind our left wing. A huge gap developed between the two fronts and Chernyakhovsky was compelled to divert some of his forces to secure his extended flank, thus weakening his strike group.

This was, of course, an unpleasant situation, but, on the other hand, the deep penetration of the 60th and 13th Armies on the Chernigov and Kiev directions opened up tempting

prospects: we could deal a blow at the flank of the enemy group that was engaging the right wing of the Voronezh Front and holding up its advance. Thus we would prevent the enemy from withdrawing behind the Dnieper, help our neighbour to advance and perhaps even jointly occupy Kiev. My suggestion was discussed, but turned down. More, I was rebuked for giving Chernyakhovsky permission to storm Priluki, which lay outside our boundary line.

As our left flank was becoming more and more extended, at my request GHQ assigned us General P. A. Belov's 61st Army from their reserve, which we committed to action between the 65th and 13th Armies on the Chernigov sector. This substantially reduced the 60th Army's zone of operations, and stepped up its drive towards Kiev. I visited Chernyakhovsky after his troops had liberated Nezhin. The officers and men were in high spirits, they seemed oblivious of fatigue and eager to go on, spurred by the common desire to assist in the liberation of the Ukrainian capital. Naturally, Chernyakhovsky felt the same, and all his actions were prompted by the desire to reach Kiev as quickly as possible. He achieved much. Scattering the remnants of routed enemy divisions, the 60th Army advanced rapidly and soon reached the approaches to the city.

One can imagine our disappointment when in the latter half of September, on GHQ orders, the boundary line between the Central and Voronezh Fronts was moved to the north and Kiev became our neighbour's zone. Our main attack was now on the Chernigov sector.

I called up Stalin to say that I couldn't understand the reason for this shifting of the boundary line. He said brusquely that the change had been made on the insistence of Comrades Zhukov and Khrushchov, who were on the spot and ought to know best. This reply did nothing to explain things, but there was no time, nor great need, to seek clarification.

The offensive developed successfully. Our troops crossed the Desna on the heels of the retreating enemy and on September 21 took Chernigov. The 13th Army meanwhile reached the Dnieper, and on September 22 began to effect a crossing north of Kiev on the section Mnevo, Chernobyl, Stashev. Led by experienced and resolute officers, the men used all they could find on the bank—boats, rafts, and barrels—to cross the water barrier against stiff enemy resistance on a broad front. The crossing was supported by well

organised plunging and direct artillery fire from the bank. Tanks kept up a steady barrage from the water's edge, while attack and fighter aircraft gave the ground forces support from the air. The advance infantry units swiftly crossed the river and gained a foothold on the far bank, repelling enemy attempts to push them back into the river. Artillery officers crossed the Dnieper together with the infantry and guided fire from the bridgehead. More and more men crossed under the protection of the advance groups, rapidly building up forces on the bridgehead. The enemy, taken by surprise, had no time to rush sufficient forces to oppose the crossing.

Units and supporting means streamed across the river, swelling the bridgehead force, which fanned out, gaining more and more ground. By September 23, the 13th Army already held an area 35 km in depth and 30-35 km in breadth on the western bank.

To the south, units of the 60th Army forced the Dnieper between the mouth of the River Teterev and Dymer. By September 30, the bridgehead there was 12-15 km in depth and 20 km in breadth. I directed Chernyakhovsky to push forward in a westward and southwestward movement enveloping Kiev. He, however, was drawn to Kiev as if by a magnet, and he directed his main effort southward, along the Dnieper, overlooking the fact that the enemy would find it easier to organise resistance on this sector because of the terrain and the proximity of the city, from which he could bring up all the forces at his disposal.

Chernyakhovsky's insistence on advancing towards Kiev prevented the Army from widening the bridgehead. Several days were wasted in fruitless attacks. The enemy made use of the delay to bring up fresh troops on the threatened sector and halted our units. Attempts to expand the bridgehead along the river also failed.

To the north of the 13th Army, the 61st was developing the offensive on the Chernigov sector. It crossed the Snov river hot on the enemy's heels, reached the Dnieper and sent part of its forces across to capture a small bridgehead on the western bank in the neighbourhood of Nivki Glushets.

The 65th and 48th Armies were crossing the Desna and fighting on the Gomel sector, overcoming mounting resistance, as the enemy made extensive use of the forests and marshlands in which the country abounded. These armies had a hard nut to crack, and they fought gallantly to carry out their task and negotiate the difficult terrain as quickly

as possible. They achieved this only by the end of September, when the 65th reached the River Sozh north of Gomel, followed almost at once by the 48th Army.

Thus, by the end of September the right wing of the Central Front had reached the River Sozh along its whole length and were prepared to effect a crossing, while on the left wing the 61st, 13th and 60th Armies had captured and were firmly in possession of bridgeheads on the western bank of the Dnieper.

The task set by GHQ had been carried out.

The rapid advance of our left wing in the direction of Kiev compelled a hasty withdrawal of the enemy divisions operating against the Voronezh Front. This, of course, greatly helped our neighbour. It was a pity, however, that we were not allowed to deal a blow at the enemy flank and rear, exploiting the overhanging position of the 60th Army. Not only would the help to our neighbour have been more effective, but we would also have prevented the enemy from withdrawing his troops beyond the Dnieper.

On October 5, GHQ decided to hand General Pukhov's 13th and General Chernyakhovsky's 60th Armies over to the Voronezh Front, together with the zones they occupied. Stalin informed me that the Central Front had fulfilled its task, that it was being renamed the Byelorussian Front and would receive new assignments.

The unsuccessful attempts of the Voronezh Front to advance from the small Bukrin bridgehead in the Dnieper bend south of Kiev compelled GHQ to call a halt to the operations there, so as to give the troops time to prepare for a campaign on a much broader scale than just the liberation of Kiev. This was a correct decision. The troops had advanced a vast distance, they were tired, their formations were extended, and the rear services had lagged far behind. GHQ gave them time to regroup, bring up the rear services and materiel so that the Front could prepare the better for the new offensive.

We, too, proceeded to prepare for our new tasks. This work went on with the troops continuing their offensive. All the commanders had plenty of work on their hands, but the logistical services probably had the hardest task of all. Till then all our bases, hospitals, depots and repair shops had been deployed along the railway line Kursk-Lgov-Konotop-Bakhmach. Now all this had to be redeployed to the north, on the Gomel sector—and swiftly, so as to prevent

a repetition of what had happened before the Battle of Kursk. Meanwhile autumn rains had made the dirt roads impassable, rendering our motor transport all but useless. The traffic-handling capacity of the lateral railways, badly damaged in the past fighting, was very low.

The Front Military Council tackled the transport problem. We drew up a list of top-priority shipments. The figures were impressive: 7,500 wagonloads of equipment—more than 200 trains! And this ignored the daily requirements of the troops engaged in the fighting, with their constant demand for ammunition, food and fuel.

It was our good fortune that the Front's logistical services were staffed by such experienced, knowledgeable personnel. It is with feelings of the utmost admiration and gratitude that I recall Generals I. M. Karmanov, Chief of Logistical Headquarters, N. K. Zhizhin, Chief Quartermaster, A. G. Chernyakov, Chief of Military Transportations, A. Y. Barabanov, Chief of the Medical Service, and N. M. Shnaider, Chief of the Veterinary Service, Colonels N. I. Lozhkin, Chief of the Fuel and Lubricants Section, and P. S. Waizman, Chief of the Motor Transport Department. They and the hundreds and thousands of people under their command worked indefatigably. It was a large and well-knit collective ably led by General N. A. Antipenko, who was no less ably assisted by General M. M. Stakhursky, Member of the Military Council responsible for logistical support.

War had strained the nation's economy to the limit. Supply organisations had the greatest difficulty in coping with the tremendous amount of work and the Front had to take upon itself some of their functions. Notably, we were ordered to help local bodies in food and fodder procurements. We fully realised the vital importance of this. Practically all able-bodied men were at the war, and the collective and state farms were kept going by women, old men and adolescents, and it was often physically impossible for them to make up for the shortage of manpower. At the end of the summer we assigned 27,000 men and 250 officers to work on the collective- and state-farm fields of Orel, Sumy, Chernigov and, later, Gomel regions, where they helped harvest the crops. Two thousand lorries provided by the Front delivered threshed grain to flour mills and from there to the Front depots.

For ourselves we procured meat in Balashov, Penza and Saratov regions, that is, 600 to 1,000 km away. The collec-

tive and state farms provided 75,000 head of cattle for the Central Front. As the railways were busy hauling other traffic, the cattle was herded on foot, and hundreds of soldiers had to turn themselves temporarily into herdsmen.

This, of course, added to the difficulties of our logistical services. For their part, the local authorities, Party and Komsomol organisations, collective farmers and state-farm workers stinted no effort to help the front. Everywhere our representatives met with the greatest support. This joint work to procure food for the front brought the Soviet working people and their fighting men even closer together.

IN BYELORUSSIA

The intended transfer of the 13th and 60th Armies to the Voronezh Front raised the question of what to do with our Front reinforcing means operating in the zone of these armies, which were delivering the main attack. We could not part with them as this would make it impossible for us to proceed with our new tasks. On the other hand, it seemed a pity to weaken these armies. The best thing now, instead of wasting time on regrouping, would have been to exploit the favourable position of Pukhov's and Chernyakhovsky's forces on the western bank of the Dnieper, reinforce them with tanks and artillery and drive towards Kiev from the north before the enemy could bring up larger forces. . . .

General A. I. Antonov called up from Moscow to say that GHQ wanted to know whether an artillery salute in honour of the troops who had forced the Dnieper should be fired now or later on.

I said that I thought the salute could wait as there was no need to alert the Hitler command before time. A strike at Kiev, I said, would be more worthy of consideration. Antonov suggested that I put forward my ideas directly to the Supreme Commander. I did this at once, but Stalin replied that the decision had already been taken about operations on the Kiev sector and it was too late to revise it. The Front means of reinforcement, he said, would remain at my disposal, I was to leave Pukhov and Chernyakhovsky only their organic means, since these armies were now the Voronezh Front's concern. As for the salute, Stalin thought I was right and it could be postponed for a while.

We parted with two excellent commanders, Chernyakhovsky and Pukhov, and their troops. We received three armies, together with their zones, from the dissolved Bryansk Front: General I. V. Boldin's 50th, General A. V. Gorbatov's 3rd, and General V. Y. Kolpakchi's 63rd. Now in pursuit of the enemy, these armies had reached the River Sozh and forced

a crossing, capturing several bridgeheads on the western bank. They had drawn almost level with our Front's right flank, and there was no need to undertake roundabout troop transfers. The main thing was to give the enemy no respite.

Troops of our Front were already fighting on Byelorussian soil. The men needed no urging, they all fought heroically to drive the nazi invaders from our land as quickly as possible.

But it was growing harder and harder to advance. Our units had been considerably depleted in the heavy fighting, and replenishments came mainly from hospitals, in the shape of convalescent wounded returning to their units. A substantial source of manpower was the drafting of inhabitants of the liberated territories. We were getting more and more arms and materiel, but there was still a shortage of manpower.

Before embarking on the campaign for the liberation of Byelorussia, we regrouped our forces closer to the centre of the Front. Our CP was moved to Novo-Belitsa, on the Gomel sector, where the Byelorussian Government and Communist Party Central Committee were located.

We quickly established liaison and communication with the new armies joining the Front, and I went with K. F. Telegin to review the troops on the spot. Front Military Council Member, P. K. Ponomarenko, and M. S. Malinin contacted the Byelorussian partisans. They were a great force here, and we wanted to draw up plans for joint action in the course of the operation. In this we received invaluable help from Comrade Ponomarenko as Chief of Partisan Headquarters and First Secretary of the Byelorussian Communist Party.

When we arrived in the zone of the 50th Army it had forced the River Sozh and was fighting to expand its bridgeheads on the western bank, where it had captured Krichev, Chirikov and many other villages and communities. On the right flank troops had forded the River Pronya and were fighting German units counterattacking from the direction of Mogilev. Though badly understrength, the Army remained a formidable force. However, the rate of advance was slowed down by the shortage of artillery shells.

General Gorbatov's 3rd Army was also expanding its bridgeheads on the western bank of the River Sozh: it had covered a great distance over difficult terrain against fierce resistance. The men were tired, the units were considerably

undermanned, but their fighting spirit was high. Both officers and men were fired by their successes. The Army Commander and his staff were on top of the situation and fully realised that in the circumstances there could be no thought of respite.

Alexander Gorbatov was an extremely interesting personality. A bold and thoughtful general and fervent admirer of Suvorov, he believed above all in suddenness, speed and far-reaching thrusts into the enemy flank or rear. Gorbatov led a Spartan life and, like Suvorov, spurned comfort and took his meals from the ranks' kitchen.

His Suvorov principles served him well in combat, but on occasion he took them too literally, in disregard of the changed conditions. In our time of mass armies with continuous frontlines it is not so easy to envelop an enemy. The forces of one army may prove insufficient to breach the enemy positions and it may take a large-scale operation involving several army groups. The present situation offered an example of such a comprehensive operation in which Gorbatov's army had been relegated to the rather modest role of operating on a secondary sector and pinning down enemy forces while the main group of the Front dealt a blow on the decisive line of advance.

Seasoned commander that he was, Gorbatov on receiving orders to advance spared no effort to carry out the task. But the situation was such that despite all his efforts he could not achieve the results he expected. The upshot was that he declared bluntly that I, as Front Commander, was not utilising his army correctly. I read his complaint and forwarded it to GHQ.

This act of Gorbatov's only enhanced my opinion of him. I saw that here was a solid, thoughtful general whose sole thought was of carrying out his tasks. Since no reply came from GHQ, I decided, contrary to the accepted practice, to lay all the cards before the general and explain all aspects of the part his army was to play in the situation. Gorbatov thanked me and assured that the assignment would be carried out to the best of his ability.

His letter evidently had some effect, as shortly afterwards GHQ began informing us more fully of their plans and intentions and the part allotted to our troops in their implementation.

As for Gorbatov, he managed to show his mettle even on a secondary sector. With expert timing, his 3rd Army dealt

the enemy a sudden blow, routed him and forced a crossing over the Dnieper hot on his heels. But of this later on.

Our weak point was shortage of ammunition. Transport lines were stretched to breaking point, the railways destroyed by the enemy were not yet restored. The logistical services could not keep up with the troops' rapid advance. Ammunition supplies were meagre indeed, and whatever we could ship by Front transport means was rushed to the units on the left wing delivering the main effort.

To my great regret, in assigning Gorbatov his task I could not promise the requisite amount of artillery and mortar shells for his army, which would have to do with the old "starvation rations". Yet the situation demanded continued effort to pin down enemy forces and thus support the advance on the main sector.

General Kolpakchi's 63rd Army, which had been halted at the River Sozh, was now preparing to force it. Although the troops were worn out, morale was high. The men knew that hard fighting lay ahead and they prepared energetically for new engagements. On the whole the Army created a good impression on me.

On the Front's main line of advance, General P. L. Romanenko's 48th Army was engaged in heavy fighting at the very walls of Gomel, which the enemy had turned into a well-fortified strong point. Acting in co-ordination with the 65th Army advancing south of Gomel, Romanenko's troops had succeeded in forcing the Sozh, and now they were widening the bridgehead, against stiff enemy resistance.

General P. I. Batov, bogged down in the country between the Sozh and the Dnieper, was fighting stubbornly on difficult marshy and wooded terrain. The enemy fully realised the threat posed by an advance of our forces between the Sozh and the Dnieper and kept bringing up units to strengthen this sector.

The delay in the advance at Gomel made us seek a quick alternative. We decided to shift the pressure to the south, leaving only units of the 48th Army in the sector between the Sozh and the Dnieper to harass the enemy and pin down as many forces as possible while the 65th Army, acting in co-ordination with the 61st, struck on the Loyev, Radul sector lower down the Dnieper.

This decision was enthusiastically welcomed by Batov, who immediately got down to business. The Army's units had to be returned secretly from the western bank of the Sozh to the eastern and moved to their new area, from which they would proceed to force the Dnieper. Batov was given only six days to prepare—the most we could allow, as every hour counted. The troops succeeded in making the best of this very close deadline. The Army Commander, his Chief of Staff, I. S. Glebov and the Military Council Member, N. A. Radetsky, conceived a bold manoeuvre. To hide the regrouping operations from the nazis, Batov left one corps on the old positions with the task of continuously harassing the nazis in order to divert their attention. General D. I. Samarsky's 19th Infantry Corps coped with this task brilliantly.

Now the whole Front's success hung on the operations of the 65th Army. We therefore gave it all our means of reinforcement. To divert the enemy's attention from the main assault, the 50th and 3rd Armies were on October 12 ordered to launch attacks on their sectors. It was with a heavy heart that I gave them their missions, fully aware of the scarcity of means at Boldin's and Gorbatov's disposal, but it was in the common interest, and certain quite conscious sacrifices had to be made.

As we foresaw, the offensive of the 50th and 3rd Armies scored some initial successes. On the third day, however, the enemy threw in additional forces, counterattacked and forced our units back to their initial positions. Fortunately his attempts to exploit the success were thwarted. The 63rd Army was also unable to achieve any marked success and expand its bridgehead on the western bank of the Sozh north of Gomel; in fact, the troops were barely holding it in the face of fierce enemy attacks.

On the other hand, the 65th Army's offensive in the Loyev direction, launched on October 15, yielded immediate success. In spite of enemy resistance from advantageous positions on the high western bank of the Dnieper, our troops forced the river, carried Loyev by storm and forged ahead. Units of the 61st Army, operating to the south, on the western bank of the Dnieper, also went into action.

Our troops' harassing activity on the Front's right wing had pinned down considerable enemy forces, denying him the possibility of transferring units to the Loyev sector to forestall a breach. Now, with the imminent threat of our

forces coming out into the rear of the whole Gomel group, the enemy had to start withdrawing his units from the Sozh-Dnieper area. Taking advantage of this, the 48th Army overthrew enemy security units and advanced deep into his territory. Meanwhile Samarsky's 19th Infantry Corps forced the Dnieper north of Loyev and raced towards Rechitsa, securing the right flank of its 65th Army. The 61st Army also improved its positions on the western bank of the Dnieper by sending in its main forces from the eastern bank.

Taking into account the difficult terrain, criss-crossed by large rivers, and the strongly fortified enemy defence lines, including the vaunted Eastern Wall, possession of a bridgehead 40 km in frontage and 20 km in depth on the western bank of the Dnieper was a major achievement for the troops on the left wing of our Front. It overhung the whole of the enemy's Gomel group, compelling him to bring up forces from other sectors of the front, and thus weakening his defences there. The nazis had succeeded in occupying their second line of fortifications, some 20 to 25 km west of the Dnieper. Our troops had been unable to overcome this line in a single rush, and the enemy began counterattacking with ever greater forces with the purpose of restoring the situation on this sector. Reconnaissance data confirmed that the line here was strongly fortified.

I decided to halt the offensive temporarily. The 65th and 61st Armies were ordered to consolidate on the line achieved, placing all their divisions in the first echelon. Meanwhile M. F. Panov's 1st Don Guards Tank Corps, B. S. Bakharov's 9th Tank Corps, V. V. Kryukov's and M. P. Konstantinov's two cavalry corps and N. V. Ignatov's artillery assault corps were rushed from the Front reserve to the Loyev area. The 48th Army continued to ferry its main forces to the western bank of the Dnieper, concentrating for the attack on Rechitsa. I. I. Fedyuninsky's 11th Army, assigned to us from the GHQ Reserve, was preparing to strike jointly with the 63rd Army north of Gomel in the direction of Zhlobin.

The main attack, as before, was to be delivered by troops on the Front's left wing, where we duly concentrated our main forces and means. The objective was to attack from the Loyev bridgehead, penetrate the enemy defences, take Rechitsa, Vasilevichi and Kalinkovichi and cut into the rear of the enemy's Gomel group. D-day was tentatively set for November 10, by which time the operation was to be

thoroughly prepared. Supplies, especially ammunition, were still the main bottleneck.

The plan of the operation was the work of a large team. The initial estimates had been drawn up by the Front Headquarters. Those who had contributed most actively to the formulation of the plan were Military Council Members, Ponomarenko and Telegin, the Chief of Staff, Malinin, and the arms and services chiefs, Kazakov, Oryol, Proshlyakov, Maksimenko and Antipenko. Later the tasks had been worked out in detail with the army commanders, who had been assembled at P. I. Batov's CP. This was a system of preparing for an operation that I always adhered to—time permitting, of course.

Meanwhile fighting continued on our Front—to hold and widen the bridgeheads, to improve the line of departure for the forthcoming offensive.

By this time forces of the neighbouring Western Front continuing their successful advance had reached the line Lenino, Bribin, where they encountered organised resistance and were compelled to halt.

The armies of our neighbour on the left—the First Ukrainian (formerly Voronezh) Front—were engaged in heavy fighting on the approaches to Kiev, where the enemy was stubbornly repelling all attempts to breach his defences.

Opposite our Byelorussian Front we had the German Army Group Centre (4th, 9th and 2nd Armies) whose task was to prevent us from storming the Eastern Wall. We had already tested its strength and knew that it would be hard to take in a head-on assault. What was needed was a bold manoeuvre involving diversionary action to mislead the enemy. The initiative was in our hands and we could well afford the risk of pretending to concentrate forces on one sector of the front while preparing to strike on another. This is just what we did. I. I. Fedyuninsky's 11th Army together with V. Y. Kolpakchi's forces continuously attacked the enemy north of Gomel, drawing his attention to the area while we prepared the main attack on the Loyev sector.

On the eve of the attack I arrived with the Front arms and services chiefs and General S. I. Rudenko, Commander of the 16th Air Army, at the 65th Army CP in Loyev. We reviewed the operation plans once again. Since the main attack was in the 65th Army zone, I decided that in the initial stages of the operation the tank corps and cavalry should be subordinated to the Army Commander, P. I. Ba-

tov, thus giving him greater room for initiative. I would be there with my assistants, to be at hand in case of need and make any necessary adjustments.

The attack was launched on November 10, and on the very first day we broke through the enemy's defences. On the second day tank and cavalry corps poured into the breach. Operating in close co-operation, they advanced swiftly, routing enemy units that attempted to put up a resistance on some sectors. The forces of the 48th Army advancing towards Rechitsa along the western bank of the Dnieper also developed the offensive successfully. Batov took a daring decision, ordering two infantry divisions and two tank brigades of Panov's corps to execute a turning movement into the rear of the nazis defending Rechitsa. As a result of this surprise blow the town was carried with few casualties.

Exploiting the success, part of the 48th Army forced the Berezina at its confluence with the Dnieper and set up a bridgehead south of Zhlobin.

General Batov made able use of the high mobility of the tank and cavalry corps to pursue the enemy westward, through the forests and swamps of the Polesye country. Also hot in pursuit of the enemy were the forces of General P. A. Belov's 61st Army, which were already approaching Mozyr. The invincible Eastern Wall which the nazi propaganda had lauded to the skies was penetrated by the forces of the Byelorussian Front's left wing on a frontage of 120 km.

By this time the troops were advancing against stiff resistance by an enemy striving to check our offensive at all costs. Great courage, drive and initiative were required of officers and men alike, and they had ample opportunity to display these qualities. The tankmen were especially good.

Here is an example, one of many. Tanks of Bakharov's corps had attacked the enemy's defences on the western bank of the Dnieper jointly with the 65th Army. A tank platoon under Lieutenant Alexander Palyansky broke through the enemy positions. There were no friendly troops behind them, but they went on undaunted, destroying the nazis with machine-gun fire and running them down with their tanks, and stormed into the township of Gorodok, defended by a garrison of more than five hundred.

The enemy, stunned by the sudden appearance of Soviet tanks, fled, leaving four heavy guns and other weapons.

Going ahead with his mission, Lieutenant Palyansky then attacked the village of Starodubki, annihilating nore than 200 nazis there. The tank crews captured several mortars with thirty crates of shells and used them against the enemy, repelling four enemy counterattacks and holding the village until the approach of the tank brigade's main forces.

For this exploit, which played an important part in penetrating the enemy defences, Lieutenant Palyansky was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

The penetration of the Front's strike force deep into the rear of the enemy forces defending the Gomel area, the successful actions of Gorbatov's 3rd Army, which had dealt a sudden blow from the right in the direction of Bykhov, and the steadily mounting pressure in the centre by units of the 63rd and 11th Armies, forced the enemy's Gomel group to withdraw. On November 26, Gomel, a large regional centre of Byelorussia, was completely liberated from the nazis.

By the end of November, after twenty days of offensive fighting, the Front's forces had inflicted a serious defeat on the enemy, throwing him back 130 km and liberating a substantial part of Byelorussia.

The Gomel-Rechitsa operation helped our neighbour, the First Ukrainian Front, which was engaged at the time in a major offensive on the Kiev sector, by pinning down the enemy and preventing him from shifting a single division from Byelorussia to the Kiev area.

All through the campaign we had kept in touch with the Byelorussian partisans, who carried out all our assignments unfailingly. They blew up bridges behind enemy lines, damaged railway tracks, destroyed fuel depots and ammunition dumps, located targets for our aircraft and supplied us with invaluable information about the enemy.

Having carried out its primary task of penetrating the enemy's main defence line, the Byelorussian Front engaged in fighting to establish the best line of departure for the impending decisive battles to free the whole of Byelorussia and its people, who were heroically fighting the enemy occupation. However, the time was coming when we should have to think of calling a halt to offensive operations. The troops were exhausted, difficult campaigns were in the offing, and they required thorough preparations: establishment of communications, shortening of supply lines, restor-

ation of demolished crossings over wide rivers. The retreating enemy had done everything in his power to stem our advance, blowing up tracks, embankments, bridges. One device he employed was a special hook attached to a locomotive that caught up and snapped every single sleeper. There were endless marshes all around and to move our equipment, we had to build corduroy roads, make cuttings through forests, and bridge numerous rivers and marshy flood valleys.

Now that the 3rd, 63rd and 11th Armies had reached the Dnieper, the frontage on our right wing had contracted substantially, and GHQ had in consequence decided to withdraw the 11th Army to its reserve.

Stalin rang me up to ask whether I knew of a good general who could command an army at Leningrad. He emphasised that I must realise the importance of such an assignment. Without hesitation I named General Ivan Fedyuninsky. Stalin thanked me and ordered Fedyuninsky to be dispatched at once by plane to Moscow.

I had known Fedyuninsky from our service together before the war in the Kiev Special Military District, where we had both commanded corps—he an infantry, and I a mechanised corps. We had been on manoeuvres together, working out various problems of co-ordination. We had also started the war together. He was undoubtedly a talented general, an excellent organiser and master of troop leadership. In recommending him for such an important and responsible sector of the front I had been confident that he was just the man for the job, and I was not mistaken.

In December forces of the Byelorussian Front continued local fighting to improve their lines of departure. On the right wing I. V. Boldin's 50th Army pushed its left flank forward to the Dnieper at Novo-Bykhovo; its main forces on the east bank were facing north, straddling the country between the Pronya and the Dnieper and linking up with the Western Front's 10th Army in the neighbourhood of Chausy. A. V. Gorbatov's 3rd Army was preparing to cross the Dnieper, capture a bridgehead and take Rogachov. P. L. Romanenko's 48th Army held positions on the northern bank of the Berezina south of Zhlobin, repelling enemy attempts to push it off the bridgehead.

Troops of the 65th and 61st Armies had advanced in the general Mozyr-Kalinkovichi direction, Batov's units on their right flank were approaching Parichi.

After three unsuccessful attempts to deliver its main blow from the Bukrin bridgehead south of Kiev, our neighbour on the left, the First Ukrainian Front, had finally given up the idea and regrouped to the north of the city.

The offensive launched on November 3 from there was successful, and on November 6 the Ukrainian capital was liberated. Exploiting this success, the First Ukrainian Front advanced far to the west, freeing many towns and villages, including the city of Zhitomir.

The liberation of Kiev and the broad scope of the operations to sweep the invaders out of the Ukraine was heartening news to us.

In view of the considerable advance of our forces, we had moved our CP to the neighbourhood of Gomel, where we had taken up our quarters in a small township of one-storey, mostly wooden, buildings that had remained more or less intact. This was a rare thing. The nazis had practically razed Gomel to the ground leaving heaps of rubble in place of what had once been a beautiful city. With fiendish savagery the enemy had destroyed all buildings and even sheds. During the street fighting our men had captured many "firebrands"—nazi cut-throats specially assigned to set fire to all undamaged buildings.

We had hardly set up house in our new place when I was called to the telephone. Stalin said that Vatutin was in difficulties. The enemy had attacked him and taken Zhitomir. The situation was deteriorating and if nothing was done to stop it, the nazis might strike at the flank of the Byelorussian Front. Stalin sounded worried and irritated. He concluded by ordering me to go at once to the First Ukrainian Front's HQ in the capacity of GHQ representative, assess the situation for myself and take necessary steps to repel the enemy advance.

I did not relish this assignment, but orders are orders, and I departed, taking only V. I. Kazakov, the Front Artillery Chief, with me and leaving my deputy, General I. G. Zakharkin as acting Front Commander. He was an experienced general, an excellent commander and fine comrade, and I could fully rely on him to lead the troops no worse than I.

As I was about to depart I was handed a telegram from the Supreme Commander with instructions to assume command of the First Ukrainian Front if I deemed it necessary without seeking additional instructions. I must admit that this order embarrassed me.

Indeed, why should I have been selected to investigate the situation on the First Ukrainian Front? However, there was no time for reflection. The thing now was to study the situation and arrive at a decision without undue haste or bias.

The Front HQ was located in a wood west of Kiev. Vatutin, forewarned of my arrival, met me with a group of staff officers. He looked worried.

I had known Vatutin since the time when I had served in the Kiev Special Military District, where he had been the Chief of Staff. A general, highly educated in military science, always calm and self-controlled.

At first he refused to be drawn into a friendly discussion, though I kept stressing that I regarded our meeting as no more than that of two comrades, the commanders of neighbouring fronts. Vatutin, however, stuck to a tone of self-justification, making the conversation sound more like a guilty subordinate reporting to his superior. I got impatient, and repeated that I had come not to conduct an investigation but as a neighbour whose only desire was to help him to overcome his temporary difficulties.

"Let us talk only in this spirit," I said to him.

After that Vatutin thawed gradually, his spirits began to revive and soon the strained atmosphere disappeared. We made a thorough study of the situation and found that there was, after all, nothing terrible in it.

Exploiting the immobility of the Front, the enemy had gathered together a powerful tank group and struck at different sectors. Vatutin, instead of retaliating with a strong counterblow, had remained on the defensive. That had been his mistake. He explained that if it hadn't been for the proximity of the Ukrainian capital he would have risked stepping up activity long ago.

Actually, though, there was no risk, for in addition to several separate tank corps Vatutin had two tank armies deployed one behind the other, to say nothing of the field armies and GHQ Reserve artillery. With all these forces it was essential to attack, not remain on the defensive. I advised Vatutin to launch a counterattack without delay. Vatutin got down to work with a will, but not before obliquely inquiring when I intended to assume command over the First Ukrainian Front. I retorted that I had no intention of doing anything of the sort, that I considered him as good a Front Commander as I, and in general I wished my stay here to

be as short as possible as I had plenty of work of my own. Vatutin's spirits soared.

I was somewhat surprised by the way Vatutin organised his work. He personally edited all directives and orders and discussed questions by telephone and telegraph with the armies and headquarters. What, then, was the Chief of Staff doing? I found General Bogolyubov at the other end of the village. When I asked him why he permitted the Front Commander to burden himself with staff work, Bogolyubov said there was nothing he could do about it, as the Front Commander insisted on managing everything himself.

"But that's not right," I said. "You have to help the commander. It's your direct duty as a general and a Communist."

It should be said that Bogolyubov's knowledge and qualifications made him completely suited for his job. Perhaps a feeling of false pride prevented him from straightening out his relations with the Front Commander.

Bogolyubov said that he would do all he could to set things right. I discussed the matter with Vatutin as well, and he fully agreed with me.

"It's all because I was a staff officer for so long," he said self-deprecatingly. "I always feel I must do everything myself."

We discussed how best to set matters right. Running ahead, I must say that Vatutin coped with his task brilliantly and dealt the nazis such blows that they quickly came to their senses and hastily assumed the defensive.

I reported my conclusions over the phone to the Supreme Commander, outlining the measures the First Ukrainian Front was beginning to carry out and stating that Vatutin was quite in place as a Front Commander. I requested permission to return to my Front. Stalin told me to submit my report in writing, which I did that very day. The next morning I was handed a message from GHQ authorising me to return to the Byelorussian Front.

Vatutin and I parted warmly, both of us pleased that everything had worked out so well. Vatutin expressed his feelings in a very firm handshake. From the reply received from Moscow I understood that GHQ considered that I had coped with the task.

On the Byelorussian Front, meanwhile, events continued to develop favourably. The 65th Army's left flank had advanced to Kalinkovichi, the 61st was on the approaches

to Mozyr. Taking into account our extremely lean supplies, this was, in the circumstances, a great achievement.

To be sure, there were setbacks as well. Batov, engrossed in his efforts on his left flank, had failed to notice that the enemy had pulled up large forces against his right flank, though we had warned him to be on the look-out. He realised the danger only when the nazis dealt a powerful blow, overran the weakened units of the right flank and began to pour into the rear of the Army's main forces. Resolute measures taken by the Army and Front Command eliminated the danger. The enemy was halted and assumed the defensive. However, the Army Commander's failure to organise adequate reconnaissance and the fact that he had ignored the Front's warning of the danger to his right flank cost us dear, and we lost substantial territory on the very important Parichi direction.

Incidentally, at the time, the enemy frequently resorted to a tactic of drawing out our units by simulating a hasty retreat so as then to strike at the flanks. It was imperative that commanders at all levels should be constantly alert to the possibility of the crafty enemy setting and springing such traps, and we had to be ready to counter his subterfuges and retaliate effectively.

The end of December saw the launching of the so-called Zhitomir-Berdichev offensive operation of the First Ukrainian Front on our left, which continued into the middle of January 1944. As a result Soviet forces took Novograd-Volynsky, Zhitomir, Berdichev and Belaya Tserkov, inflicting a shattering defeat on the enemy.

It was apparent that GHQ had shifted the centre of gravity to the Ukraine and the southern wing of the Soviet-German front in general. Field and tank armies, tank corps and artillery formations from GHQ Reserve, tanks, ordnance, aircraft and manpower replenishments were all swung southwards.

The Byelorussian Front received practically nothing, though its objectives remained unchanged. We had to advance with steadily dwindling forces, and GHQ was only too well aware of this.

Still, we realised that there was no other way. Our task was to continue activities so as to pin down as many enemy forces as possible and thereby facilitate the advance on the main line of attack, and we spared no effort to carry out

this task. We did not expect major achievements, but neither did we mark time.

During the great offensive of the four Ukrainian fronts our units, in co-ordination with Vatutin's right-flank forces, also scored some successes: the 61st Army took Mozyr, the 65th carried Kalinkovichi, the 48th improved its positions on the right bank of the Berezina, the 3rd forced the Dnieper in extremely difficult conditions and occupied Rogachov and a bridgehead on the western bank, compelling the enemy to pull out of his own bridgehead on the eastern bank at Zhlobin. The 50th also advanced slightly on its left flank, but was forced to deploy its front facing north as its neighbour, the Western Front's 10th Army, had not budged.

These operations were carried out by the Front's forces on a starvation ration of ammunition. Only on April 15 did we receive GHQ orders to assume the defensive.

TWIN STRIKE

By the spring of 1944 our troops in the Ukraine had pushed a long way forward. Then the enemy brought up fresh forces from the west and halted the First Ukrainian Front's advance. The fighting became protracted, and this compelled the General Staff and GHQ to shift the main effort to a new sector.

Aware of the situation that had developed on the Western Front, our right-hand neighbour, under the command of General V. D. Sokolovsky, and on the First Ukrainian Front on our left, where General Zhukov had now replaced the mortally wounded Vatutin, we came to the conclusion that the centre of gravity was bound to shift to the western strategic direction and the forthcoming campaign would develop in Byelorussia. This would enable our troops to reach very important lines along the shortest routes and subsequently provide favourable conditions for striking at the enemy on other sectors.

The Front lived in anticipation of great events. The preparation of any major campaign, naturally, requires time. Following the enemy's defeat at Kursk, the forces of the Central Front, later renamed the Byelorussian Front, had advanced a great distance with continuous fighting. They were in dire need of replacements; they also needed materiel, ammunition, fuel. The rear services and depots had to be brought up and essential supplies organised, hence a high priority was to restore old roads and lay new ones. This now became one of our special concerns, along with strengthening of the lines we had achieved.

We were worried whether we would have enough time and whether GHQ would help us bring our forces up to complete combat strength. General Vasilevsky, Chief of the General Staff, was in the south, co-ordinating the operations of two Ukrainian fronts, and General A. I. Antonov was substituting for him. I had the highest esteem for Antonov, but in spite of his positive qualities as a master of operational

planning, he rarely, if ever, insisted on a point in the face of the Supreme Commander's objections. During my visits to GHQ I often discussed questions of support of a forthcoming operation with him and as a rule his reply to any requests of mine was, "Let Comrade Stalin decide the question himself."

Things began moving when GHQ organised a new Front between ours and the First Ukrainian. The new army group, which skirted the southern fringe of the Polesye country up to Vladimir-Volynsky, was designated the Second Byelorussian Front, our Front being accordingly renamed the First Byelorussian.

In March the Supreme Commander called me up and briefed me on the general lines of a new major operation and the part the First Byelorussian Front was to play in it, asking my opinion of the plans. Stalin used to discuss with the Front Commanders the plans of campaigns when they were being drawn up, and I must say that this was most helpful.

The First Byelorussian Front was to operate in the general direction Bobruisk, Baranovichi, Warsaw, skirting Polesye on the north. The Front's left wing abutted on the vast Polesye marshes, which restricted the possibility of manoeuvre to a bare minimum. The success of the operation required the closest co-ordination with the Second Byelorussian Front, from which we were separated by a large tract of wooded and marshy country. I outlined my views to Stalin, suggesting that it would perhaps be expedient to bring the whole zone occupied by both Byelorussian fronts under a single command.

I should say that prior to this conversation with Stalin I had already discussed such a variant with my staff: namely, that the whole zone from Bykhov to Vladimir-Volynsky be placed under a single commander. This would give us great possibilities for manoeuvre and make for a bold solution involving a combined enveloping movement skirting the Polesye from the Bobruisk area in the north and the Kovel area in the south. Of course, some difficulties in troop control could be expected, but this did not worry us. We had had ample experience of ensuring effective command, in at least as complex a situation, in mopping up the surrounded enemy group at Stalingrad. In any case, it would be easier to control a combined force than to co-ordinate operations with a neighbouring Front in carrying out a common task.

Just at that time chance tipped the scales in favour of this proposal. The Second Byelorussian Front got into trouble when the enemy suddenly attacked and took Kovel. Stalin suggested that I elaborate our variant of uniting both front zones, report to GHQ and then go at once to the Second Byelorussian Front, under P. A. Kurochkin, to take joint measures to liquidate the enemy's breakthrough. Running ahead, I must say that when we got there we saw that there was no purpose in undertaking a minor operation with the limited objective of liberating Kovel on the eve of a major offensive.

Shortly afterwards a GHQ directive arrived, handing over to our Front the whole Polesye sector with all forces in it. The total frontage of the First Byelorussian Front was thus enlarged to almost 900 kilometres. Even in this vast-scale war it was unusual for an army group on an offensive mission to occupy so great a frontage. Naturally, our forces increased accordingly, and by the latter half of June the Front included ten field armies, one tank and two air armies, the Dnieper River Flotilla and, additionally, three tank, one mechanised and three cavalry corps.

Changes were also made in the organisation of the fronts, and that organisation lasted till the end of the war.

According to GHQ plans, the summer campaign of 1944 was to develop in Byelorussia and involve the forces of four fronts: General Bagramyan's First Baltic, General Chernyakhovsky's Third Byelorussian, General Petrov's Second Byelorussian (our neighbour on the right), and our own 1st Byelorussian. GHQ briefed the Front Commanders on the overall strategic plan of the campaign, the right thing to do. Knowing the overall plan, the Front Commander gained a better idea of his own place in the operation, and had more scope for initiative.

The plan called for a sequence of operations prior to our offensive, one deriving from the other, and involving first the Leningrad Front, then the Karelian, followed by the main Byelorussian campaign and, finally, the First Ukrainian Front's operation.

In an attempt to hold on to Byelorussia, the German Command concentrated large forces there: the Army Group Centre under Field-Marshal von Busch (one tank and three field armies); several of the right-flank divisions of the 16th Army of the Army Group North, and panzer divisions of the Army Group North Ukraine, were also operating in

the zone of our impending offensive. Altogether on the front from Sirotino to Kovel there were, by June 23, 63 German divisions and 3 brigades with a total strength of 1,200,000 effectives. The enemy had 9,635 guns and mortars, 932 tanks and 1,342 airplanes.

Holding the front opposite our right wing was the German 9th Army, which barred our way to Bobruisk. The 2nd Army was defending a frontage of 400 km in the Polesye area, opposite our centre and left wing. On the Bobruisk direction, where four armies of the Front's right wing (Lieutenant-General A. V. Gorbatov's 3rd, Lieutenant-General P. L. Romanenko's 48th, Colonel-General P. I. Batov's 65th, and Lieutenant-General A. A. Luchinsky's 28th) were to attack, the enemy had 131,000 men, 5,137 machine-guns, some 2,500 guns and mortars, and 356 tanks and self-propelled gun mounts. His forces were supported from the air by 700 planes. In addition to tactical reserves, the enemy had operational reserves of up to 10 infantry divisions in the Brest and Kovel sectors.

We prepared the campaign with great thoroughness. Planning was preceded by extensive work in the field and, especially, on the forward lines, where I often had literally to crawl about on all fours. After studying the terrain and the enemy defences I decided that it would be worth dealing two strikes on different sectors of the Front's right wing: one with the 3rd and 48th Armies from Rogachov towards Bobruisk and Osipovichi; the other with the 65th and 28th Armies from the lower reaches of the Berezina and Ozarichi in the general direction of Slutsk. Both attacks were to be main efforts. This ran contrary to established views, according to which there can be only one main attack, for which the main forces and means are assembled. This decision called for a certain dissipation of forces, but it was intentional. In the marshes of Polesye there was no other way out, or rather, there was no other way to achieve success in the operation.

The terrain in the Rogachov-Bobruisk sector was such that we could assemble only the 3rd Army and part of the 48th there for the beginning of the offensive. If this group were not assisted by a strike on another sector the enemy might well prevent a breakthrough, as he would have ample opportunity to bring up forces from sectors not under attack. Two main attacks dealt with the situation much more effectively. The main forces on the Front's right wing would

be committed wholly to action (which would have been impossible on one sector, owing to its comparatively limited area); the enemy would be denied any real possibility of manoeuvre; success achieved initially, even on only one of these sectors, would place the enemy forces in a difficult situation, and enable our Front to step up the offensive.

The plan was finally cleared at GHQ on May 22 and 23. Our considerations concerning an attack by forces of the Front's left wing on the Lublin sector were endorsed, but the decision concerning two strikes on the right wing was criticised. The Supreme Commander and his deputies insisted that one main attack be delivered from the Dnieper bridgehead held near Rogachov by the 3rd Army. Twice I was asked to retire to the next room to consider the GHQ suggestion, and each time I returned with added resolve to defend my own decision. Seeing that I insisted on our point of view, Stalin finally endorsed the plan in the form we had submitted it.

"The Front Commander's insistence," he remarked "proves that the organisation of the offensive has been fully thought out. This is a reliable guarantee of success."

The operation received the code name "Bagration". The forces of four fronts were given important strategic and political objectives: to liquidate the enemy's salient in the Vitebsk, Bobruisk, Minsk area, defeat and rout Army Group Centre, liberate the Byelorussian Soviet Republic, then commence the liberation of fraternal Poland and subsequently carry the war on to the territory of nazi Germany. Great importance was attached to effective co-ordination, especially between the Third and First Byelorussian Fronts, whose troops were to advance rapidly westward in a pincer movement that was to close west of Minsk.

Our Front was to launch the offensive with four armies on the right flank, surround and annihilate the enemy's Bobruisk group, take the Bobruisk, Glusha, Glussk area and then continue to advance in the Bobruisk-Minsk and Bobruisk-Baranovichi directions. The forces on the left wing were to advance after the German troops had been surrounded in the neighbourhood of Minsk and the right wing had reached the Baranovichi line.

The 3rd Army held a small bridgehead on the western bank of the Dnieper north of Rogachov that was quite suitable for action by all arms in the Bobruisk direction.

General P. L. Romanenko's 48th Army, which held positions south of the Zhlobin-Bobruisk railway along the northern bank of the Berezina, with a small bridgehead on the other side, was much worse off. I had crawled all over the front-line positions and seen that it was virtually impossible to advance here. The surrounding terrain was one huge marsh dotted with small islands of scrub and dense forest. There were no conditions for concentrating tanks and heavy artillery, a road even for a light gun would require several layers of logs. I therefore ordered General Romanenko to regroup his main forces on the Rogachov bridgehead on the left flank of the 3rd Army and act jointly with that Army; the units remaining on the Berezina bridgehead were to pin down as many enemy forces as possible and thereby facilitate the main attack.

The 65th and 28th Armies, which were to deliver the second strike, also faced woody, marshy terrain criss-crossed by tributaries of the River Pripyat.

Our officers and men were faced with the extremely arduous task of fighting their way over this difficult ground. This was a feat that required special training. Men learned to swim, cross swamps and rivers with any available means and find their way through woods. They made special "swamp shoes" to cross the bogs, and built boats, rafts and platforms for trundling machine-guns, mortars and light artillery. The tankmen also underwent training in the art of marsh warfare. General Batov once showed me such a "tankodrome" in a marsh in the Army rear. For more than an hour we watched machine after machine drive into the swamp and cross it to the other end. Helped by engineers, the crews provided each tank with faggots, logs and special triangles for crossing wide ditches. The engineers deserve special mention for their devoted work and resourcefulness. In 20 days in June they removed 34,000 enemy mines on the sector of the main attack, made 193 passages for tanks and infantry and effected dozens of crossings over the Drut and the Dnieper, to say nothing of building miles and miles of corduroy and graded roads.

In this intense labour of vast masses of men our Communists and Komsomols were always to the fore. They acted as a cementing force in all the units, an example for all to follow.

At the beginning of 1944 we encountered certain difficulties, inevitable in war. Our forces had suffered substantial

casualties in the fierce fighting during the advance from the Kursk Bulge to the Dnieper, and our Party ranks were depleted. To quote but one figure, 1,224 companies had lost their Party organisations through the heroic death of Party comrades in the fighting for the liberation of the Soviet land. The roots linking the Party with the people and the army are indestructible, and the best of our men were increasingly drawn to the Party ranks. This process of consolidation within the ranks was organised and headed by the Political Department under Lieutenant-General S. F. Galadzhev, a man of great intelligence and integrity. By the beginning of the Byelorussian campaign most of the units again had full-blooded, actively functioning Party and Komsomol organisations, companies averaging five to ten Communists and ten to twenty Komsomol members. It should be remembered that soldiers who had distinguished themselves in battle were given priority in joining the Party. This made for a tremendous growth of Party influence among the troops.

On receiving the GHQ directives we briefed the Front Staff and army commanders, going over all aspects of the forthcoming offensive: troop control at the beginning of and during the operation, concealment of troop movements, selection and preparation of routes and roads, to say nothing of all kinds of stratagems to mislead the enemy concerning our intentions.

Special attention was given to air, ground and radio reconnaissance. The 16th Air Army carried out blanket aerial photography of the enemy's fortifications in the Bobruisk sector, and maps with the information obtained were circulated among the units. In the armies of the right wing alone some 400 trench raids were carried out, our scouts taking more than 80 information prisoners and many important documents.

All headquarters were required to maintain constant air and ground control over the effectiveness with which all activities at the Front were concealed from the enemy. He was to see only what *we* wanted him to see. Troops deployed and regrouped under cover of night, while in the daytime trainloads of dummy tanks and guns travelled from the front to the rear. In many places we built fake crossings and roads. Guns were concentrated on secondary lines, from which they launched artillery attacks and were then removed to the rear, dummies being left in their place on the firing

positions. General Malinin, my Chief of Staff, was inexhaustibly inventive in this respect.

We conducted several field exercises for the commanders of the large units and studied relief maps of the terrain on which we were to operate. Shortly before the attack we held staff exercises and war games on the subject of "Penetrating enemy defences and committing mobile formations to action". As GHQ representative with the special task of co-ordinating the operations of the First and Second Byelorussian Fronts, Zhukov took an active part in this work.

The Front HQ was a close-knit team of seasoned soldiers with ample experience in troop organisation and control, well able to deal with the most exacting situations both in the preparatory stage and in the fighting itself. Front and Army staffs regularly checked the troops' readiness for the offensive. As a rule our senior officers also took part in the tactical field exercises. They checked the marksmanship and general standards of training of newly arrived replacements and saw to it that ammunition and food supplies come in an uninterrupted flow. Several officers of the Front HQ were permanently assigned to the armies and corps to provide liaison and give all possible assistance on the spot.

As the operation was to be carried out on two sectors of the Front divided by the basin of the River Pripyat, particular attention was paid to efficient troop organisation and control. The main CP was moved to Ovruch and two auxiliary CPs were set up, one in the neighbourhood of Duravichi on the right wing, the other at Sarny on the left wing.

The observation posts were brought up as close to the troops as possible: distances from the line of departure were 500-1,000 metres for a divisional OP, two kilometres for a corps OP, up to three kilometres for an army OP. Observation towers were built in several places.

All basic questions of artillery, air and engineering support of the operation were settled in advance. The Front logistical services were instructed to have adequate motor transport available to transfer troops and materiel to the required sector: we had some experience in this from the time of the battle of the Kursk Bulge.

Tremendous preparatory work for the offensive went on at all levels—in the armies, corps, divisions, regiments. Division strength was brought up to an average of 6,500 effectives. The Byelorussian Partisan Headquarters co-

ordinated their operations with us and liaison was established between partisan detachments and our units. We gave the partisans specific tasks concerning where and when to strike at nazi communications and bases. They blew up trains on the Bobruisk-Osipovichi-Minsk, Baranovichi-Luninets and other railways. All their strikes were carried out in close co-ordination with us and were subordinated to the purposes of the forthcoming operation.

By the latter part of June the Front's troops were poised for the attack. On both strike sectors we had built up a three- to fourfold superiority over the enemy in manpower and a four- to sixfold superiority in artillery and armament. We had powerful mobile groups capable of surrounding enemy troops, and air cover and support was to be provided by over 2,000 planes.

With the initiative completely in the hands of the Red Army and with an equal balance of forces on the scale of the Front as a whole, we could even risk concentrating overwhelming forces on the main line of attack at the expense of substantially weakening the secondary sectors.

This was a tremendous advantage to us.

The troops were well-equipped with motor transport, artillery tractors, self-propelled guns and other equipment designed to enhance their overall manoeuvrability.

The home front had worked well to supply the Soviet Armed Forces with everything needed for victory.

For the purpose of studying the situation on the Kovel sector, on the Front's left wing, I went with the arm and service chiefs to the auxiliary CP at Sarny. We made the journey from Ovruch, where the main CP was located, in an armoured train, as the forests were still infested with bands of Bendera men and other fascist hangers-on. Later we travelled back and forth in our irreplaceable U-2 hedgehoppers.

The four armies occupying the forward echelon here were improving their defences and preparing their headquarters for the coming fighting. The part these formations played in the fighting will be described on a later page. One significant encounter, however, must be mentioned now. The Polish 1st Army, formed at the request of the Union of Polish Patriots out of Polish volunteers, was coming up to join us on the Kovel-Lublin sector.

We were excited about this and drove out to meet our new comrades-in-arms. The Army Commander was General

Zygmund Berling, an impressively serious man, who held himself very erect. One could tell from his bearing that he was a seasoned soldier who knew army service and had seen action. General Berling had, in fact, been a regular officer in the Polish Army. He had fought at the time of the nazi invasion of Poland and now he had decided to continue the struggle against the enemy with the Polish units fighting side by side with the Red Army.

General Berling reported on the condition of his formation, emphasising that he and his comrades hoped that their stay in the second echelon would not be a long one. The troops made a good impression. One felt that they were ready to fight and impatient to come to grips with the enemy who had enslaved their country. I assured officers and men that they would have ample opportunity to distinguish themselves in battle.

We met other leading figures who had taken part in organising and training this first major formation of the future Polish Army. One of the Members of the Polish 1st Army's Military Council was Alexander Zawadzki, an old Polish revolutionary, a former miner, member of the Polish Workers' Party and greatly esteemed by the working class and all working people of Poland and well loved by the troops, a man of profound wisdom, charming simplicity and tireless energy. Another Member of the Military Council was General Karol Swierczewski, who had risen from private to general in the Red Army and commanded an international brigade in Republican Spain. Subsequently General Swierczewski assumed command of the Polish 2nd Army.

I consider it my comradely duty to name among the first organisers of new Poland's armed forces the Polish 1st Army's Chief of Staff, V. Korczica, Chief of Operations, V. Strazewski, and such officers of its well-knit staff as Jaroszewicz, Poltorzycki, Biewzuk, Rodkiewicz, Kiniewicz, Pszczolkowski, Yuzwiak, Guszcza and Waryszak.

We spent several days with the Polish comrades before returning to our Front's right wing.

On the night of June 23, I went with Generals Telegin, Kazakov and Oryol to the 28th Army. Army Commander A. A. Luchinsky's OP was set up in a forest. A platform had been erected nearby on a level with the towering pine trees. We decided that this was the best point for following the fighting on this sector. G. K. Zhukov, who had from the outset supported the idea of one main attack from the 3rd

Army's Dnieper bridgehead, left us and went there. Before leaving he remarked jokingly that General Gorbatov and he would reach out over the Berezina and pull us out of the marshes to Bobruisk. Actually it worked out the other way round.

The First Byelorussian Front's offensive began on June 24 with powerful air strikes on both lines of attack. For two hours artillery pounded the enemy's defences. At 0600 hrs troops of the 3rd and 48th Armies went over the top, followed an hour later by both armies of the southern strike force. Fierce fighting ensued.

During the first day the 3rd Army operating on the Ozerane, Kostyashevo sector achieved little success. In the face of fierce enemy infantry and panzer counterattacks two of its infantry corps succeeded in taking only the front-line and second-line trenches on the Ozerane, Verichev sector, and were then forced to dig in. The offensive on the 48th Army's sector also ran into difficulty. The wide marshy flood valley of the River Drut impeded the infantry and, especially, armour. It took two hours of severe fighting for our units to knock the nazis out of the front-line trenches, and the second line was not captured till noon.

The offensive was most successful in the 65th Army's sector. In the first half of the day the 18th Infantry Corps supported by aviation, broke through all five lines of enemy trenches and by midday had penetrated five to six kilometres, taking the powerful strongholds of Rakovichi and Petrovichi. This enabled General Batov to throw M. F. Panov's 1st Guards Tank Corps into the breach, and it swiftly moved into the rear of the Germans' Parichi group. Meanwhile, the 65th Army's infantry, exploiting the tanks' success, occupied the line Grachi, Gomza, Sekirichi.

Units of the 28th Army overcame enemy resistance and reached Brodtsy, Ospino, Rog.

Thus, in the first day the southern strike group broke through the enemy defences on a 30-kilometre frontage, penetrating five to ten kilometres in depth. In the Knyshevichi, Romanishche area the tanks extended the breakthrough to a depth of 20 kilometres. This favourable situation was exploited on the second day by committing General I. A. Pliyev's combined cavalry and mechanised group to action at the boundary of the 65th and 28th Armies. It

advanced to the River Ptich west of Glussk and forced the river at several points, whereupon the enemy began a general retreat to the north and northwest.

The time had now come to throw all forces into a swift advance on Bobruisk.

In the evening of June 24, Zhukov rang me up and, with characteristic outspokenness, congratulated us on our success, saying that it was we who would now have to reach out to Gorbatov from the southern bank of the Berezina.

By the end of the third day General Batov had reached the Berezina south of Bobruisk, while General Luchinsky's troops had forced the River Ptich and taken Glussk. The southern group of the Front's right wing could now pursue the offensive.

On the Front's northern wing fighting continued unabated all night on June 24. The enemy counterattacked repeatedly, striving to knock the wedge we had driven into his defences back into the river. This, however, he was unable to do.

In the morning of June 25, after a brief artillery preparation, the 3rd Army resumed the offensive. In the middle of the day, to accelerate the breakthrough, General Gorbatov committed two tank brigades to action, and on June 26 B. S. Bakharov's 9th Tank Corps was thrown in from the Dobritsa line with the task of penetrating deep into the enemy's rear, capturing the Staritsa area and cutting the Mogilev-Bobruisk highway.

I ordered the 16th Air Army to support the northern group's offensive. Thousands of tons of bombs were rained on the enemy, who had begun to pull back to the Berezina

The 9th Tank Corps broke into the enemy rear, reached the eastern bank of the Berezina at Titovka, and by the morning of June 27 it had straddled all the highways and river crossings northeast of Bobruisk. The infantry units of both armies of the northern group accelerated their advance, enveloping the Bobruisk group from the northeast.

By this time the 65th Army's 1st Guards Tank Corps had made a thrust northwest of Bobruisk, cutting off five German divisions from their westward retreat routes.

The Front's main forces were to advance as far as possible on Osipovichi, Pukhovichi and Slutsk, and we also had to mop up the surrounded enemy forces. In Bobruisk this task was assigned to units of the 65th Army and southeast of the city, to the 48th Army.

ROUT

About 40,000 nazi troops were surrounded in a pocket some 25 kilometres in diameter. We had sealed off their routes of retreat to the south and west quite effectively, but on the first day only isolated tank units held the surrounded enemy on the north and northwest. The commanding general of the German 9th Army decided to exploit this, and on June 27 he ordered General von Lützow, Commander of the 35th Army Corps, to break through at all costs, either towards Bobruisk or northwards towards Pogoreloye to join the 4th Army. Von Lützow decided to destroy all his materiel and strike northward. His plans, however, were foiled by the 108th Infantry Division, sent by the Army Commander to the help of General Bakharov's tanks, which straddled the highway leading to Mogilev. On the right wing our troops reached the Berezina in the neighbourhood of Svisloch.

Towards the evening of June 27, explosions and fires began in the enemy's dispositions as the nazis destroyed guns, tractors and tanks, burned machines, slaughtered cattle and razed villages to the ground. Covering forces consisting of crack officers and men continued to resist stubbornly and occasionally even counterattacked. However, General Gorbatov's and General Romanenko's forces, in cooperation with units of the 65th Army, tightened the ring of encirclement.

In the neighbourhood of Titovka, the enemy launched fifteen counterattacks in a desperate attempt to break through to the north. General P. A. Teryomov, Commander of the 108th Division, described the situation as follows: "The fiercest attack took place on the sector held by the 444th and 407th Regiments. The main forces of our artillery regiment were concentrated on this sector. About 2,000 enemy officers and men supported by fairly strong artillery fire attacked our positions. Our guns opened fire from a range of 700 metres, and machine-guns joined in from 400 metres.

The nazis continued to advance. Shells exploded in their midst, machine-gun fire mowed them down. Still they came forward, stepping over the bodies of their men. They came on blindly. It was a mad attack. We saw the whole terrible picture. There was nothing heroic in it. The nazis seemed in a state of trance. There was in the movement of this huge mass of men more of the mulish stubbornness of the herd than of fighting men intent on forcing their will on the enemy at all costs. Nevertheless the sight was an impressive one."

Our aircraft spotted a large concentration of enemy infantry, tanks, artillery and other materiel in the Dubovka area and were ordered to attack it. For one hour 526 aircraft pounded the enemy. The nazis ran out of the woods, rushed about the clearing, many of them dived into the Berezina, but there was no escape. The whole area soon began to look like a huge graveyard strewn with mauled bodies and mangled machines.

In two days the enemy lost more than 10,000 dead; we captured 6,000 prisoners, 432 guns, 250 mortars and over 1,000 machine-guns. This was the end of the nazi group southeast of Bobruisk.

Fighting meanwhile continued for Bobruisk, where there were some 10,000 German soldiers, while remnants of scattered units were still making their way towards the city from the east. General Hamann, the Commandant of Bobruisk, organised a strong all-round defence system, with weapon emplacements in buildings, barricades in the streets and tanks dug into the ground on street corners; the approaches to the city were heavily mined.

In the afternoon of June 27, units of the 1st Guards Tank Corps and the 105th Infantry Corps attacked the enemy in the city, but failed to make any headway. Fighting continued throughout the night and the following day. On the night of June 28, the enemy pulled back part of his troops to the city centre and concentrated large forces of infantry and artillery in the northern and northwestern districts. The commandant had decided to abandon the city that night and break through to the northwest.

Following an artillery and mortar attack on the positions of our 356th Infantry Division, tanks moved forward, followed by skirmish lines of officer strike battalions and infantry. Officers and men, all of them drunk, attacked in wave after wave in spite of the deadly fire of our artillery

and machine-guns. Hand to hand fighting broke out in the darkness, and for an hour the men of the 356th fought heroically to beat off the enemy onslaught. At the cost of great losses the nazis succeeded in driving several wedges into the 356th Division's defences.

At dawn advance detachments of the 48th Army supported by artillery crossed the Berezina and engaged the enemy on the eastern outskirts of Bobruisk.

By 0800 hrs regiments of the 354th Infantry Division took the railway station. The beleaguered Germans made one last-ditch attempt to break through to the northwest, again attacking our 356th Division. They succeeded in penetrating its defences, and 5,000 men headed by General Hofmeister, Commander of the 41st Panzer Corps, poured into the breach. They did not get away, however, and our forces operating northwest of the city engaged and destroyed the fleeing enemy. On June 29, the 65th Army, jointly with the 48th, completed the liberation of Bobruisk.

As a result of this operation we had broken up a powerful enemy defence system along the southern edge of the Byelorussian bulge. Our troops had advanced up to 110 kilometres and this enabled us to push on swiftly towards Minsk and Baranovichi.

In six days of fighting we had captured or destroyed 366 tanks and self-propelled artillery mounts and 2,664 guns of different calibres. The enemy left nearly 50,000 dead on the battlefield, and more than 20,000 were captured.

The Dnieper Flotilla commanded by Captain, 1st Rank, V. G. Grigoriev had also taken part in the encirclement and defeat of the Bobruisk enemy group. Ships of its 1st Brigade had moved up the river to the frontline, reached the bridge at Parichi, disrupted the enemy crossing and approached Bobruisk. In three days the flotilla had ferried 66,000 troops over to the right bank of the Berezina.

With the enemy routed at Bobruisk by the First Byelorussian Front, and at Vitebsk-Orsha and Mogilev by the adjacent fronts, favourable conditions were created for new blows.

On June 28, GHQ gave the First Byelorussian Front the task of advancing on Minsk with some portion of its forces, while the main forces advanced on Slutsk, Baranovichi with the object of cutting off the enemy's lines of retreat to the southwest and then, jointly with troops of the Third

Byelorussian Front, effecting a speedy encirclement of the enemy's Minsk group.

In these operations the commanders of our mobile formations displayed great ingenuity and skill. On July 2, General Panov's 1st Guards Tank Corps dealt a powerful blow at the centre, broke through the defences of the German 12th Division and, jointly with the 82nd Division's infantry, took the Pukhovichi area. Meanwhile General Pliyev's cavalry and mechanised group made a thrust at Slutsk. At dawn of July 2, it took Stolbtsy, Gorodzya and Nesvizh, severing the Minsk group's supply and communication lines in the direction of Baranovichi, Brest, Luninets.

Units of the 3rd Army's 85th Infantry Corps reached the line Pogost, Cherven, where they joined up with forces of the Second Byelorussian Front.

General Bakharov's tank corps, sent on a turning movement south of Minsk, carried the road junction of Lyubyach on July 2 and continued to advance northward along the Slutsk-Minsk highway. The same day tank units of the Third Byelorussian Front took Smolevichi and advanced on Minsk from the northeast, thus completing the encirclement of the enemy's 4th Army east of the Byelorussian capital.

The enemy was beating a hasty and disorderly retreat along the Mogilev-Minsk highway and the minor roads on both sides of it. The partisans had blown up bridges and crossings causing great jams in many places. Our airmen continuously bombed enemy troop columns.

Towards the end of July 3, after fierce fighting the Byelorussian capital was completely cleared of the enemy.

A terrible picture presented itself to the eyes of the liberators. Minsk lay in ruins. The few buildings that had survived the fighting had been mined but fortunately were saved by the swiftness of our advance. The Government House and the building of the Central Committee of the Byelorussian Communist Party, notably, were successfully demined.

The inhabitants who had endured well-nigh inhuman sufferings during the occupation, greeted our heroes enthusiastically; the whole nation hailed the liberation of Minsk.

The mopping up of the nazi troops in the Minsk pocket was assigned to the Second Byelorussian Front, reinforced by the 3rd Army taken from us.

Troops of the First Byelorussian Front's right wing continued their swift westward advance. The enemy defeat

at Vitebsk, Bobruisk and east of Minsk resulted in a 400-km breach in the German front which the nazi command could not fill. On July 4, GHQ demanded that we make all possible use of this favourable situation. We decided to continue to pursue the enemy and, by a pincer movement of the 48th and 65th Armies in the general direction of Baranovichi, surround the Baranovichi group and destroy it. General Pliyev's mobile group and General Firsovich's mechanised corps, operating on the flanks, were to envelop the enemy. Subsequently, both armies would develop the success along two parallel highways (Slonim-Pruzhany and Baranovichi-Brest) in the direction of Brest with the object of executing a deep enveloping movement and surrounding, jointly with units of our left wing, the German Pinsk group.

On July 8, Baranovichi was liberated, and by the 16th our formations had reached the Svisloch, Pruzhany line, having advanced 150-170 kilometres in 12 days.

The enemy's defeat at Baranovichi and on the River Shara endangered his Pinsk group, which began to withdraw. This spurred the advance of General P. A. Belov's 61st Army along the northern bank of the River Pripyat.

The Front's strategic position was now greatly improved. At the commencement of the Byelorussian operation our flanking groups had been separated by vast swamps; now the Polesye country lay far behind and our total frontage had contracted almost by one half.

The time had come to move forward the troops on our left wing, where we had five field armies, an air army, a tank army and two cavalry corps.[1] Early in July we began a regrouping manoeuvre to transfer the Front's reinforcing means from the right wing to the left.

We studied all the information we had about the enemy and the terrain. No changes in the position or behaviour of the enemy forces had been observed of late, but we nevertheless took the rather unusual step of starting the offensive with a reconnaissance in force carried out by advance batta-

[1] These formations were: Lieutenant-General V. S. Popov's 70th Army, Lieutenant-General N. I. Gusev's 47th, Lieutenant-General V. I. Chuikov's 8th Guards, Lieutenant-General V. Y. Kolpakchi's 69th, Colonel-General S. I. Bogdanov's 2nd Tank, Lieutenant-General F. P. Polynin's 6th Air Army, Lieutenant-General M. P. Konstantinov's 7th Guards Cavalry Corps, Lieutenant-General V. V. Kryukov's 2nd Guards Cavalry Corps, Lieutenant-General Zygmund Berling's Polish 1st Army.

lions. Our purpose was to see whether the enemy had not, perhaps, withdrawn his main forces to a line in depth, leaving only covering troops at the front. If so, we should simply be wasting ammunition needed for breaking up the main line of defence.

The idea of starting the offensive in this unusual way had been worked out in joint deliberations with Army Commanders Popov, Gusev, Chuikov and Kolpakchi. The idea was that if the reconnaissance in force revealed that the main defences had not been shifted, all our forces and materiel would be thrown into action without pausing to specify individual tasks.

The battalions began the attack on July 18. With a small group of generals I occupied a forward observation post (the Front's main CP was at Radoshin) which offered a good view of the battlefield. Supported by strong artillery fire and accompanied by tanks, they quickly advanced towards the enemy positions. The Germans replied with powerful artillery fire. Small groups of our aircraft attacked artillery and mortar positions. They were met in the air by enemy fighters. Gradually the enemy committed more and more guns to action.

In some places our infantry and individual tanks broke into the forward trenches. The pitch of the fighting rose higher and higher. There seemed to be no doubt that we were up against the main line of defence. There was no purpose in waiting any longer and I ordered the troops to proceed with the full offensive plan.

General Kazakov ordered the artillery to open fire, and the roar of guns of all calibres shook the air.

The offensive on the Front's left wing was a continuation of the operation started on the Bobruisk sector. It did not, however, mean the winding up of operations on the right wing, where our troops were pushing on towards the Brest fortified area. On the contrary, they gave considerable help to the forces engaged on the currently decisive Kovel sector by compelling the enemy to throw his main reserves into the defence of Brest.

The 47th, 69th and 8th Guards Armies had the task of breaking through the enemy front west of Kovel, after which they were to develop the offensive on Siedlce and Lublin in co-operation with armour and cavalry units. The 6th Air Army supported the ground forces with 1,465 aircraft.

In the morning of July 18, our units broke through the

enemy defences on a 30-kilometre front and advanced 13 kilometres, and on July 20, the strike groups on the left flank reached the Western Bug, forced it at three points and entered Poland.

The July fighting on the First Byelorussian Front's left wing, together with the offensive launched a week earlier by the First Ukrainian Front, our neighbour on the left, developed into a well-co-ordinated campaign of two fronts operating on adjacent flanks. Our success was greatly facilitated by the fact that the First Ukrainian Front's offensive had denied the enemy the possibility of reinforcing his troops on the Lublin sector; reciprocally, our attacks prevented him from transferring troops against the First Ukrainian Front. The whole operation, a logical continuation of the Byelorussian campaign, had been planned in advance by GHQ.

The Red Army's stupendous July offensive, which had involved five fronts, resulted in the rout of the German Army Groups North (16th Army), Centre (4th, 9th and 2nd Field and 3rd Panzer Armies) and North Ukraine (4th and 1st Panzer Armies and Hungarian 1st Army). The enemy's defences were breached along a huge frontage.

At last the time had come when the enemy, who had unleashed the war, began to experience what the Red Army had experienced in the beginning. There was a difference, though, for we had weathered our setbacks in the knowledge that they had been to a great extent due to the suddenness of the enemy's treacherous attack. We had known they were temporary and had never lost faith in the ultimate victorious outcome of the war. The enemy's defeats came after all the victories he had achieved, leaving him no hope for a more or less favourable outcome of the war, the flames of which he had kindled himself.

The time of reckoning was inexorably approaching. In vain the nazi command attempted to turn the tide by reshuffling their generals. From intelligence reports we learned that the hapless Field-Marshal Busch had relinquished command of Army Group Centre to Model, Commander of Army Group North Ukraine. "Model?" our officers commented, "We can take on Model, too."

Our Front's right wing reached the line Svisloch, Pruzhany, on the approaches to Brest, setting the stage for envelopment of the enemy's Brest grouping. This task was assigned to the 70th and 28th Armies.

The 47th Army was ordered to force the River Bug, advance to the southwest on Siedlce, defeat the opposition and prevent any German forces deployed east of the Siedlce, Lukow line from pulling back to Warsaw. Also fighting on this sector was General Kryukov's 2nd Guards Cavalry Corps.

The advance of these armies contributed to the success of those led by Chuikov, Bogdanov, Berling and Kolpakchi, which were racing westward after crossing the Bug. Overcoming enemy resistance, they carried Chelm and Wlodawa and liberated many other communities.

On July 23, the 2nd Tank Army liberated Lublin, and on the 25th it reached the Vistula at Deblin. Here General A. I. Radzievsky, who had replaced the wounded S. I. Bogdanov, handed his sector over to the Polish 1st Army advancing in the tank army's wake. The tanks were given the new task of thrusting northward along the right bank of the Vistula, taking the Warsaw suburb of Praga in their stride and holding it till the approach of the 47th Army. The Polish 1st Army was to force the Vistula on the Deblin sector and establish a bridgehead on the western bank.

By July 28, the Front's main forces on the line Brest, Siedlce, Otwock, having encountered stubborn enemy resistance, were compelled to deploy their frontline facing north. On this sector the German Command had concentrated large forces, obviously with the intention of delivering a southward counterblow east of the Vistula, so as to prevent our armies from crossing the river.

The enemy's main grouping was concentrated east of Warsaw, and the units on the Front's left wing were therefore able to advance rapidly towards the Vistula. On July 27, General Kolpakchi's 69th Army reached the river, went straight over it at Pulawy, and by the 29th had gained a foothold on the western bank. On July 31, the Polish 1st Army made an unsuccessful attempt to strike across the Vistula. By this time, though, we could throw the whole of the 8th Guards Army into the fight for the western bank, and in the morning of August 1, this Army began to force the river in the neighbourhood of Magnoszew, mouth of the River Pilica.

In the course of the day General Chuikov's troops established a bridgehead on the western bank 15 km wide and up to 10 km in depth. By August 4, the Army had thrown over the river several 16-ton pontoon bridges and

one 60-ton bridge. Chuikov used them to take his armour and all of his artillery over to the bridgehead. The engineers proceeded to build a wooden bridge on piles.

Our Front CP moved forward in the wake of the armies. As a rule it shifted to a new place only after communications had been established with all the Front's forces. This time it was set up at Wlodawa, a small town on the western bank of the Western Bug, but Malinin and Maksimenko were already busy preparing the next CP at Konkolevice village, not far from Siedlce, where fighting was still going on.

Just as we were about to drive out of Radoszin under cover of night we were raided by enemy aircraft. Fortunately no one was hurt. I mention this to emphasise the fact that enemy aircraft had special assignments to locate and attack our troop control units. We reciprocated in kind, and General Rudenko did all he could to ensure that planes of his 16th Air Army deliver telling strikes at enemy command bodies. This time, however, his aircraft had been busy providing air cover for the Vistula crossings.

The troops of the Second Byelorussian Front on our right were advancing very slowly on Bialystok. They had a very powerful enemy group before them. But though the enemy was capable of withstanding their attacks, he was unable to strike at our Front's right wing, and this was solely to the credit of the Second Byelorussian Front; we greatly appreciated this help.

By the time the enemy realised the danger facing him, it was too late: the Magnoszew bridgehead was firmly held by units of the 8th Guards Army, and the bridgehead south of Pulawy was equally firmly held by the 69th Army. The German Command began to transfer troops from sectors east and northeast of Warsaw to attack the bridgeheads. Our gallant men repelled especially fierce attacks.

Information provided by intelligence, air and radio reconnaissance confirmed the hasty transfer of enemy troops to the Magnoszew bridgehead. Chuikov's Guards needed help. We appealed to our comrades-in-arms, the Poles. Handing over the line along the Vistula bank to a cavalry corps, Zygmund Berling rushed his troops to the bridgehead, where they took up defensive positions on the 8th Guards Army's right flank. At the same time we managed to ferry over a tank corps of the 2nd Tank Army.

We were just in time. The enemy struck a terrific blow

at the bridgehead. Too late! Our defence proved invincible. Several days of fierce attacks yielded nothing for the nazis but tremendous losses.

The enemy threw in all his aircraft against the bridgehead and crossings. However, Rudenko's Air Army flew out to meet the tens and hundreds of enemy bombers, and Front anti-aircraft guns also provided substantial protection to the crossings.

The friendship of Soviet and Polish units was cemented in the course of the heavy fighting. The men of the Polish 1st Army fought bravely against the nazi invaders and won well-deserved respect.

Before reaching the Vistula and Narew, the First Byelorussian Front had waged continuous heavy offensive battles for a month and a half, suffering losses in manpower and materiel.

The enemy, retreating under our armies' powerful blows, destroyed bridges, railways and roads, and it took time to restore them.

Our supply lines were stretched out over hundreds of kilometres and could not provide all that was needed to maintain our successful advance. It was time to give our troops an opportunity to regroup and prepare for the coming decisive operations.

We could now look back with deep satisfaction on the Byelorussian campaign, so brilliantly carried out by our several fronts under overall GHQ guidance. As a result Army Group Centre had been completely routed, Army Group North Ukraine had suffered a major defeat, while Byelorussia, a large part of Latvia and substantial areas of Poland east of the Vistula had been liberated. Soviet troops had forced the rivers Nieman and Narew and reached the borders of East Prussia. The nazi defeat, to which the First Byelorussian Front had contributed to no mean extent, was overwhelming.

As I see it, the success of the Byelorussian operation was largely due to GHQ's correct timing. The Soviet Command, now in complete possession of the strategic initiative, had managed to prepare the operation with great thoroughness, ensuring the co-ordination of four army groups.

Thanks to the heroic efforts of the Soviet people led by the Communist Party the front had received adequate quantities of arms, ammunition, food and all necessary equipment throughout the campaign.

To put the GHQ directives into effect, the Front Command and Headquarters, jointly with the arm and service chiefs and with the participation of the army commanders, had drawn up a detailed plan of the operation, fixing the main attack zones and giving concrete tasks to every formation.

The forested, marshy terrain had been a severe hindrance to troop movements, and considerable engineering and communication works had been required for the campaign.

The logistical services had managed to bring up all that the Front needed in good time and to create essential stocks of materiel, arms, ammunition and food. Nor had there been any disruptions of supplies in the course of the offensive, especially in the initial stages.

Throughout the operation the Front HQ and army and unit commanders had maintained good liaison and worked in close co-ordination.

The army commanders had displayed exceptional skill in major tactics, making extensive use of enveloping and pincer movements to surround large enemy groups.

Commanders at all levels, well seasoned in the previous fighting, had led their troops with great ability.

The success of the campaign had been ensured by the skill, bravery, stamina and mass heroism of our soldiers. They had been daring and indomitable, undaunted by enemy fire, or by the marshes and countless rivers and streams. The sappers and engineers had worked with great speed under tough conditions.

The political departments and Party and Komsomol organisations had welded the Communists and Komsomols firmly together and inspired the troops as a whole to overcome all difficulties.

I must also say that all through the Byelorussian campaign GHQ had been most attentive to our suggestions and requests, supporting every useful initiative. All of which had contributed to the success of the operation.

WARSAW

On entering Poland we were at once faced with a multitude of complex problems. On the liberated territory, which by now extended to the Vistula, there were many armed Polish groups who had fought the occupying forces: the Gvardia Ludowa, Armija Ludowa, Armija Krajowa, Bataljone Chlopske. There were also mixed guerrilla groups led by Soviet officers who had been stranded or landed on enemy-held territory. The different groups embraced people of every conceivable political affinity drawn together in the struggle against the common enemy.

Now, with the coming of our troops, they received the opportunity of merging into a powerful force.

The Polish civilian population gave the Red Army a very warm welcome. They were obviously glad to see us and did all they could to help rout the nazi invaders as speedily as possible. As it advanced, the Polish 1st Army swelled rapidly with volunteers from among the local population. Units of the Gvardia Ludowa, Armija Ludowa and other resistance forces joined it. Only the AK—the Armija Krajowa—kept aloof. Our first meeting with representatives of this organisation left an unpleasant impression. On receiving information that a Polish formation calling itself the 7th AK Division had occupied the forests north of Lublin, we decided to send out several staff liaison officers to contact them. At the meeting the AK officers, wearing Polish uniform, held aloof and rejected our proposals for combined operations against the nazis, declaring that the AK took its orders only from the London Polish government and its emissaries. They defined their attitude towards us in the words, "We shall not use arms against the Red Army, but we do not wish to have any contacts." A sticky situation, to say the least.

Meanwhile the Polish National Liberation Committee assumed control as the central authority of the people's

government, and with it the responsibility for handling all such ticklish problems.

At the Polish Government's invitation, I visited Lublin, where I met most of its members. They were all patriots of their country and at the same time internationalist revolutionaries. They were shouldering a heavy burden, but were optimistic and in high spirits. I attended a parade of units of the Polish 1st Army and a demonstration of the working people of Lublin. From that time on we maintained the closest contact with the Polish Government.

On August 2, our intelligence agencies received information that an uprising against the nazi occupation had started in Warsaw. Startled by the news, the Front HQ immediately went hunting for information to assess the scale and nature of the uprising. It was so sudden that we were quite at a loss, and at first we thought that the Germans might have spread the rumour, though we could not understand its purpose. Frankly speaking, the timing of the uprising was just about the worst possible in the circumstances. It was as though its leaders had deliberately chosen a time that would ensure defeat. These were the thoughts that involuntarily came to the mind. At the time, our 48th and 65th Armies were fighting more than a hundred kilometres east and northeast of Warsaw. Our right wing had been weakened by the withdrawal of two armies to GHQ Reserve, though we still had to overcome strong opposition, reach the Narew and gain a foothold on its western bank. The 70th Army had just taken Brest and was engaged in mopping-up operations in that region. The 47th Army was fighting at Siedlce, its front facing north. The 2nd Tank Army was bogged down on the approaches to Praga, the Warsaw suburb on the east bank of the Vistula, and was busy repelling the counterattacks of the German armour. The Polish 1st Army, 8th Guards and 69th Armies had forced the Vistula at Magnoszew and Pulawy south of Warsaw, and were seizing and widening bridgeheads on the western bank: this was the main task of our left wing, a task within their capacity which it was their duty to carry out.

Such was the position of our forces when the uprising began.

Certain carping critics in the Western press did at one time charge the First Byelorussian Front and, of course, me as its Commander, with deliberately failing to support the

Warsaw insurgents, thereby condemning them to death and destruction.

The Byelorussian campaign had been without parallel in scope and depth. On the Front's right wing the advance had exceeded 600 km. Fighting all the way, our forces had strained to the utmost to carry out the tasks set by GHQ. Warsaw, however, could have been liberated only in a new major offensive operation—which was launched later on. In August 1944 many important measures would have had to be taken to capture Warsaw, even if only as a large bridgehead.

The fact of the matter is that those who had instigated the people of Warsaw to rise had had no intention of joining forces with the approaching Soviet and Polish armies. On the contrary, they had feared this. They had been concerned with other things. For them the uprising had been a political move with the objective of assuming power in the Polish capital before the Soviet troops entered it. These had been their orders from the people in London.

In their mighty westward movement, sweeping aside all obstacles placed in their path by the enemy, the troops of our Front had more than fulfilled their tasks by gaining footholds to prepare for a new operation. But it required time to launch it.

To be sure, Warsaw was close, we were engaged in heavy fighting on the approaches to Praga. But every step cost a tremendous effort.

With a group of officers I watched the 2nd Tank Army in action from an OP on the top of a tall factory chimney. We could see Warsaw. A pall of smoke hung over the city, houses were burning amid the flashes of bombs and shells. Obviously, heavy fighting was going on in the city.

So far, however, we had had no contact whatsoever with the insurgents, though our intelligence agencies had made every effort to get in touch with them.

The Polish comrades from Lublin did much to untangle the Warsaw events. We soon found out that the uprising had been organised by a group of AK officers and had begun on August 1, following a signal from the Polish émigré government in London. The uprising was headed by General Bor-Komorowski and his assistant, General Monter, Commander of the Warsaw Military District. The Armija Krajowa had played a leading part, its units were numerically the strongest, best armed and organised. All patriotically-

minded inhabitants of Warsaw, people burning with hatred of the nazi invaders and eager to throw the oppressors out as quickly as possible had joined the uprising. With arms in hand the people of Warsaw tried to smash the enemy. That was their only thought.

However, those who had initiated the Warsaw uprising in that exceptionally unfavourable situation ought to have considered before venturing on this move.

From all that I had succeeded in gleaning from the Polish comrades and the information that had reached the Front HQ, the only conclusion that suggested itself was that the leaders of the uprising were doing their best to isolate the insurgents from any contacts whatever with the Red Army. As time passed, however, the people began to realise that they were being betrayed. The situation in Warsaw deteriorated, bickerings broke out among the insurgents, and it was only then that the AK leadership finally decided to appeal to the Soviet Command—via London.

The Chief of the General Staff, A. I. Antonov, established contact between us and the insurgents immediately on receiving the message of request. On the second day after that, September 18, the BBC broadcast a report from General Bor-Komorowski to the effect that the insurgents' actions were being co-ordinated with Rokossovsky's HQ and Soviet planes were continuously dropping arms, ammunition and food for them.

Getting in touch with the First Byelorussian Front's Command presented no difficulty at all. Only the desire was needed. But Bor-Komorowski had decided to contact us only after the British attempt to help the insurgents with supplies from the air had failed. One day 80 Flying Fortresses escorted by Mustang fighters appeared over Warsaw. They flew over in groups at an altitude of 4,500 metres, dropping their load. Naturally, from such a height the cargo was scattered over a large area and much of it failed to reach the insurgents. German AA guns shot down two planes. After that the Allies made no further attempts.

In describing all this I have run somewhat ahead. I shall have the opportunity to return to the Warsaw events again. Now I should like to get back to the fighting in which our troops were engaged.

The enemy had detected a weak point in our positions between Praga and Siedlce, and decided to strike at the flank and rear of the troops that had forced the Vistula south of

the Polish capital. He had concentrated several divisions on the eastern bank in the Praga area, specifically, the 4th Panzer, 1st Hermann Goering Panzer, 19th Panzer and 73rd Infantry. On August 2, the Germans counterattacked, but were met on the approaches to Praga by units of our 2nd Tank Army coming up from the south. A fierce meeting engagement ensued. The German troops, with the strong Warsaw defence area behind them, were in a better position.

It was a situation in which the Warsaw insurgents could have tried to capture the bridges over the Vistula, and take Praga by attacking the nazis in the rear. This would have been a great help to our 2nd Tank Army, and who knows how events might have developed. It, however, ran contrary to the plans of the London Polish government, which had three representatives in Warsaw, as well as to the plans of Generals Bor-Komorowski and Monter. They had performed their evil mission and disappeared, leaving the people they had provoked into this gamble to pay the price.

The 2nd Tank Army, commanded, after Bogdanov had been wounded, by the Chief of Staff, Radzievsky, a capable and energetic general, continued to repel enemy blows from the Praga area, acting in co-operation with the 47th Army, which had liberated Siedlce and was pushing the enemy to the northwest from that town. A difficult situation had developed there: the troops of two armies were thinly stretched out along a front facing north, their last reserves committed to action, and the bottom out of the Front reserve as well. The 70th Army's advance from Brest had to be accelerated and General Batov's and Romanenko's armies had to be got out of the Belovezha Forest.

The Second Byelorussian Front on our right was lagging somewhat behind, while the 65th Army, failing to encounter any appreciable enemy resistance, quickly negotiated the Belovezha Forest—on emerging from which it landed in a trap and was attacked from two sides by units of two panzer divisions. They steam-rollered right through the middle of the Army, carving it up into several groups and for a while cutting the commander off from most of the formations. There was a moment when our units were so scrambled up with the Germans that it was hard to tell where were friendly troops and where the enemy; fighting went on in numerous small pockets. It reminded me of an engagement at the end of 1914 in the Lodz-Brzeziny area, when a surrounded German corps breaking out of encirclement had

surrounded several Russian units. The tangle, which I had witnessed while serving in the 5th Kargopol Dragoon Regiment of the 5th Cavalry Division, had been prodigious.

The units and elements of the 65th Army displayed remarkable presence of mind and stamina in the confusion. They swiftly organised perimeter defence, repelling enemy attacks and fighting to join each other. General Batov and his staff took urgent measures, and the Front dispatched an infantry corps and tank brigade to the rescue. The situation was restored, the enemy suffering heavy losses and just barely extricating himself from the mix-up. Batov, though, had experienced some unpleasant moments.

At the same time, farther to the west the 4th Guards Cavalry Corps had been forced back to the River Bug northwest of Brest and surrounded there. This was a fortified area, and General Pliyev quickly assessed the situation and easily repelled all attacks. Ammunition was delivered under cover of night by Po-2 hedgehoppers. With the approach of the 70th and 65th Armies, the corps pursued the withdrawing enemy causing him a lot of trouble with its bold, sudden attacks.

To judge by the nature of his activities, the enemy had apparently reconciled himself to defeat in the battle for the Bug line and on the Warsaw sector and was concentrating on pulling out as many of his forces as he could to the Narew river line. This was confirmed by reconnaissance data and POW statements, as well as the intensive defence engineering we detected on the Narew.

The enemy's plans had to be foiled, and the 48th, 65th and 70th Armies were ordered to strike swiftly towards the Narew, organising strong mobile task groups designed to bypass strong points, break into the enemy rear, cut off retreating troops, gain footholds on the western bank of the Narew and hold them till the approach of the main forces.

Most successful in carrying out this task was the 65th Army. By September 5, the Don Tank Corps commanded by M. F. Panov, had forced the River Narew in cooperation with infantry divisions in the neighbourhood of Pultusk and southwards. Fierce fighting broke out on the western bank, with the enemy throwing more and more fresh units into the battle in an attempt to push the troops back into the river. However, the Army Commander took the necessary steps not only to hold but even to expand the

bridgehead, which was vital to us for our forthcoming offensive.

The 65th Army's gaining the Narew facilitated the advance of the 70th Army, attacking in the general direction of Sokolow, Radzymin, Modlin (north of Warsaw), and of the 48th Army, which finally also forced the Narew at Rożany, gaining a bridgehead there.

The first half of September saw extensive, protracted fighting often going on well into the night. The enemy strove to destroy our bridgeheads on the Vistula and Narew at all costs. As usual he used panzers in force, wave after wave attacking Chuikov's troops on the Vistula and Batov's on the Narew. But it was all in vain, and his attacks were repulsed. After losing hundreds of tanks and self-propelled guns and tens of thousands of men, the German Command was forced to concede defeat and assume the defensive. Our glorious 16th Air Army had completely dominated the air in these battles and only isolated enemy planes had succeeded in getting through on "hit-and-run" strikes.

A breakthrough on the Vistula-Narew line would open the road into Germany proper. That is why the German Command continued a steady build-up of forces and means, striking at our bridgeheads and stubbornly defending their positions on the right bank of the Vistula, with occasional counterattacks. It was a difficult situation. A powerful enemy group was concentrated in front of Warsaw, it comprised the 5th Viking SS Panzer Division, the 3rd Totenkopf SS Panzer Division, the 19th Panzer Division and up to two infantry divisions. We could not allow this threat to continue and when the 70th Army came up, it was decided to try and rout the enemy forces holding the territory before Warsaw and capture Praga, its suburb. The 47th and 70th Armies, units of the Polish 1st Army, the 16th Air Army, and all the reinforcements that could be spared from other sectors of the Front, were committed to this operation.

On September 11, the fighting began, and by the 14th the troops had routed the enemy and taken Praga. The infantrymen, tank crews, gunners, engineers and airmen fought with great courage along with the gallant men of the Polish 1st Army. We also received great help in the street fighting from the people of Praga, many of whom gave their lives in the common cause.

This was when the uprising in the Polish capital should have started. A joint strike by the Soviet Army from the

east and the insurgents from Warsaw, taking the bridges, could have succeeded in liberating and holding Warsaw, though even in the most favourable circumstances that would have been just about all the Front's troops could do.

Our forces cleared Praga of the enemy and came out on the eastern bank of the Vistula. All the bridges joining Warsaw with the suburb were gone.

Fighting still continued in the capital.

Hostilities also continued in the Modlin sector, north of Praga. A relative calm had settled over the Narew bridgeheads, but fierce clashes flared up on the western bank of the Vistula. The troops holding the Magnoszew bridgehead were especially hard pressed. I must say that we succeeded in holding it largely because the defence was led by General Chuikov, Commander of the 8th Guards Army, who remained in the very midst of the inferno all through the fighting. To be sure, the Front Command did all it could to give timely help with reinforcements and aircraft.

The tragedy of Warsaw kept worrying me, and the realisation that it was impossible to launch a major rescue operation was agonising.

I spoke with Stalin over the telephone, reporting the situation at the front and everything relevant to Warsaw. Stalin asked whether the Front was capable of immediately launching an operation with the object of liberating Warsaw. When I replied in the negative he directed us to give all possible help to the insurgents so as to ease their plight. He endorsed all my proposals concerning how we could help them.

I have mentioned that, starting with September 13, we had begun to supply the insurgents by air with weapons, ammunition, food and medical supplies. This was effected by our Po-2 night bombers, which dropped their loads from low altitudes at points indicated by the insurgents. In the period between September 13 and October 1, 1944, Front aircraft flew 4,821 sorties in aid of the insurgents, 2,535 of them with various supplies. Our aircraft also gave air cover over districts indicated by the insurgents and bombed and strafed German troops in the city.

The Front AA artillery also helped the insurgents with cover from enemy air attacks, while our ground artillery suppressed enemy artillery and mortar batteries. We parachuted several officers into the city for liaison and fire adjustment and succeeded in stopping enemy air raids over

insurgent positions. Polish comrades who managed to cross over to us spoke with great appreciation of the effectiveness of our air and artillery operations.

Various insurgent organisations gladly welcomed our liaison officers and fire adjusters. But the Polish patriots warned us that the AK refused to have any dealings with us, and their leadership was behaving extremely suspiciously, fanning hostile sentiments against the Soviet Union, the Polish Government in Lublin, and the Polish 1st Army. It seemed strange that Bor-Komorowski had never even tried to establish direct contact with the Front HQ, although the General Staff had provided him with the code. It was obvious that the politicians were prepared to do anything except co-operate with us, and shortly this was confirmed.

For the purpose of extending more help to the insurgents, we had decided to ferry a strong force across the Vistula, to Warsaw. Organisation of the operation had been undertaken by the Polish 1st Army HQ. The time and place of the landing, the plans for artillery and air support and co-ordination with the insurgents had all been agreed in advance with the leaders of the uprising.

On September 16, units of the Polish Army embarked to cross the Vistula. They landed at points on the bank supposedly held by insurgent units, which was what the whole plan had been based upon. But then these footholds were found to be in nazi hands!

The operation developed haltingly. The first assault succeeded in gaining a foothold with great difficulty. More and more forces had to be thrown into action, and casualties began to soar. Yet the insurgent leaders, far from giving any help to the assault forces, did not even try to contact them.

In such circumstances it was impossible to hold on to the western bank, and I decided to call off the operation. We helped the assault party to return, and on September 23, these units of three infantry regiments of the Polish 1st Army rejoined the main forces.

In undertaking their heroic assault, the Polish soldiers had consciously embarked on a mission of self-sacrifice to help their compatriots. They had been betrayed by men who held the interests of the "powers that be" above those of the country. Soon we learned that, on instructions from Bor-Komorowski and Monter, the AK units had been withdrawn from the riverfront suburbs into the heart of the

city. Their place had been taken by nazi troops. Among those who had suffered had been units of the Armija Ludowa, whom the AK command had not warned of their intention to withdraw from the riverfront.

From that moment the AK leadership began to prepare for capitulation, which is confirmed by fairly extensive archive materials. Our offers to help those desiring to escape from Warsaw to the right bank were left unheeded. After the capitulation only a few dozen insurgents managed to cross to our side of the Vistula.

The Warsaw uprising thus reached its tragic conclusion.

A lull had set in at Warsaw, the enemy having assumed the defensive along the whole front. Only in the Modlin sector, where the enemy held a small triangular bridgehead on the eastern banks of the Vistula and the Narew with the apex at the confluence of the two rivers, were we engaged in heavy but fruitless fighting. On this lowland sector only a head-on assault was possible. The opposite banks overlooked the ground our troops had to storm. The Germans had all the approaches under cross artillery fire from positions beyond both rivers and from artillery in the Modlin fortress at the apex of the triangle.

Units of the 70th and 47th Armies attacked the bridgehead but in spite of heavy losses and expenditure of large quantities of ammunition they were unable to dislodge the enemy. Orders, however, were to deny the enemy any foothold on the eastern bank. I decided to investigate the situation on the spot. In the evening I studied the plans of the offensive to be launched the following morning, then with two staff officers drove to a forward battalion of the 47th Army. Equipped with a telephone and a flare pistol we took up our station in a trench. It was arranged that a red rocket should signal the beginning of the assault, and a green rocket meant the assault was being called off.

At the appointed time our guns, mortars and rocket launchers opened fire. They hit the enemy hard, but he hit us back much harder. Thousands of shells rained on our troops from beyond the Narew and the Vistula and from the fortress. Guns of all calibres, including heavy fortress ordnance, mortars and six-barrel rocket launchers let loose a hurricane of fire. The enemy used up shells unsparingly, as though bent on showing what he was still capable of. Obviously we could not hope to liquidate the enemy bridgehead until this artillery system was suppressed. We cer-

tainly lacked the means for such a task at present, and the object was hardly worth the effort needed to achieve it.

I ordered the signal calling off the attack to be given, and over the telephone told Generals Gusev and Popov that the offensive was off.

When I returned to the Front CP I called up Moscow and reported my decision to halt the offensive. Stalin did not answer at once and asked me to wait. When he called me to the telephone again he said that he agreed with my decision. He ordered that the offensive should be halted and the troops of the Front should go over to a firm defence and begin preparing for a new offensive operation.

Occasionally the enemy still harassed the troops holding the Magnoszew bridgehead, but had suspended all activity on the Narew. This seemed suspicious. Our airmen observed that German fighters were for some reason very zealous in covering the supply routes extending north from the area west of Warsaw. Radio reconnaissance detected movements of enemy panzer formations we knew well in the same direction. The Front HQ warned Generals Batov and Romanenko of the enemy's suspicious activity, but the Army Headquarters, lulled by the quiet on their sectors, were not worried. What was more, Batov even decided to withdraw some units from the frontline to the second echelon to carry out field exercises in preparation for the forthcoming offensive.

When the storm struck, it took the 65th Army completely by surprise. The enemy had managed to concentrate large tank forces in depth, and on October 4 he delivered a stunning blow. The powerful artillery preparation lasted for about an hour, followed immediately by a panzer attack in several waves. By throwing large forces into the offensive the enemy hoped to deal our troops holding the bridgehead a crushing blow.

He acted with great resolution, and on the first day in some places pushed our units back to the very river, where they managed to hold on by the skin of their teeth only thanks to the support of direct-laying gunfire from the eastern bank.

The threat to the bridgehead was great. I hastened to Batov's HQ, taking Telegin, Kazakov, Oryol and our Front Chief of Engineers Proshlyakov with me. Front reinforcing means, especially antitank units and tank brigades, were

rushed to the 65th Army. Poor weather limited activity in the air.

At the Army CP we discussed with General Batov what help was needed and where it should be directed. The actual manner in which it would be used was left to the Army Commander's discretion.

In the afternoon the Front reinforcements joined in the fighting, and the situation on the bridgehead gradually improved. The enemy's onslaught weakened, and when our tank formations crossed over to the bridgehead the nazis were halted and then thrown back. On the third day of the fighting our aircraft was able to take off, and the initiative reverted to us. Soon the 65th Army counterattacked and expanded the bridgehead. Now we could deploy the 70th Army there, as well, and think not only in terms of defence (though we had learned our lesson) but also of preparing the bridgehead as a springboard for our troops into Germany.

We received tentative data from GHQ concerning the direction in which the First Byelorussian Front would operate, and the staff got down to elaborating plans for the new offensive. The basic idea was to deliver the main strike from the Pultusk bridgehead on the Narew, enveloping Warsaw from the north, coupled with a deep penetration from the Magnoszew and Pulawy bridgeheads south of Warsaw in the direction of Poznan. The Front's forces were to be regrouped accordingly. M. S. Malinin, my Chief of Staff, reported our considerations to the General Staff. They were endorsed by GHQ, and the army commanders and their staffs got down to working out the details of the operation.

Now that we had a clear idea of the Front's objective, we eagerly looked forward to its preparation and implementation. However, I was not to lead the troops of the First Byelorussian Front in this operation.

I had been visiting the Pulawy bridgehead on the western bank of the Vistula, held by the 69th Army under General Kolpakchi, a man of high culture and a knowledgeable soldier whom I had known from my service in the Byelorussian Military District in 1930-31, when I had commanded the 7th Samara Cavalry Division and Kolpakchi had been chief of staff of an infantry corps. I had spent the day discussing variants of the 69th Army's operation from Pulawy bridgehead with him.

I returned to the Front CP in the evening. We had just assembled in the mess when the duty officer reported that GHQ wanted me on the telephone. Stalin was on the other end, and he told me that I was being appointed Commander of the Second Byelorussian Front. This was so unexpected that I blurted without thinking,

"What have I done to be transferred from the main to a secondary sector?"

Stalin said that I was wrong, and that the sector was a part of the general western sector on which three fronts—the Second Byelorussian, First Byelorussian and First Ukrainian—were to operate. The success of this decisive operation depended on the closest co-ordination of these fronts, which was why GHQ was giving special attention to its choice of commanders. Stalin went on to say that Zhukov was being appointed Commander of the First Byelorussian Front and asked my opinion of his candidature.

I said that I thought he was the very man for the job, that the Supreme Commander always chose the most capable and deserving generals to help him, and that Zhukov was certainly one of them. Stalin said that he was satisfied with my reply and then went on to say in a friendly voice that the Second Byelorussian Front was to receive a very important task and would be reinforced by additional formations and means.

"If you and Konev don't advance," he said, "neither will Zhukov."

In conclusion Stalin said that he would not object if I took with me to my new post members of my staff with whom I had worked before. Thanking him for his concern, I said that I hoped to find capable workers and good comrades in my new post. Stalin said briefly,

"Thank *you* for that."

This conversation took place on November 12, if I am not mistaken, and on the following day I left to take up my new post. Marshal Zhukov had not yet arrived. A few days later I decided to go and see him and also bid my old comrades farewell.

It was Artillery Day and we spent the evening in a friendly gathering of officers and generals. Many good wishes were expressed all round. I parted warmly with Zhukov and my old colleagues and returned to the Second Byelorussian Front in high spirits, pleased with myself for not having succumbed to the temptation of taking my old

colleagues with me. In my new post, too, I found excellent officers both at Front HQ and in the services and we quickly found common ground.

The Second Byelorussian Front's CP was located in a small village in open country, and it had been bombed several times by lone German planes. Evidently the enemy suspected the presence of some kind of headquarters. There was much work to be done in preparation for the operation and this would inevitably lead to an increase in traffic around the headquarters, which the enemy would not fail to notice, so we decided to transfer the CP closer to the frontline, to a forest in the neighbourhood of Dlugosedlo. While the engineers got busy equipping the new CP we stayed where we were.

I took over from General G. F. Zakharov. I must say that I felt rather awkward: he had been a good commander and here was I stepping into his shoes. It was all very well for me, as I was assuming an identical post, but Zakharov was appointed second-in-command to G. K. Zhukov on the First Byelorussian Front. My deputy was to be Colonel-General K. P. Trubnikov, transferred from the First Byelorussian Front. He had been appointed without my being consulted, but I was well satisfied as I knew him to be a good, experienced commander and a fine person.

It took only one day for me to take over affairs from General Zakharov, who briefed me on the state of the troops and introduced the staff personnel. On the following day he left to take up his new appointment.

I also left that day, for GHQ, where the Supreme Commander personally outlined my mission. We were to advance in the northwestern direction. Stalin said that we need not mind the enemy's East Prussian group, which would be dealt with by the Third Byelorussian Front. No mention at all was made of any co-ordination with our neighbour on the right, though subsequent events forced us to turn a substantial part of our troops to the north. On the other hand, special emphasis was placed on co-ordination with the First Byelorussian Front. I even recall that, while examining our map, Stalin drew an arrow with a red pencil pointing towards the enemy's flank, and remarked,

"This is how you will help Zhukov if the First Byelorussian Front's advance slows down."

In a later conversation Stalin reiterated that I had been appointed, not to a secondary, but to a highly important sector, and he then made the surmise that the First and Second Byelorussian and First Ukrainian Fronts were probably the ones destined to end the war in the West.

At GHQ, I was told that the Front boundary was being shifted southward to the confluence of the Narew and the Vistula, and the troops holding this sector were being transferred to us. This meant that General Batov's 65th Army would be with us, which pleased me very much. I had been with the 65th Army since Stalingrad and had had ample opportunity to observe the splendid combat qualities of its men, commanders and, of course, above all, Pavel Batov, a brave and talented soldier. General V. S. Popov's 70th Army, with which I had advanced from the Kursk Bulge to the Narew, was also reverting to me. Now it held the Front's extreme left wing on the western bank of the Narew, its left flank abutting on the Vistula. The Army Commander was a veteran of many battles, a former cavalryman, who led his army with calm confidence. True, at times he seemed rather too phlegmatic for a cavalryman, whom one usually expects to be dashing, forceful and ready to run any risks. General Popov was a rather slow starter, but thoughtful and persistent, and he always saw any job he undertook through to the end, though sometimes he had to be prodded to move a bit faster.

The Front received from the GHQ Reserve the 2nd Strike Army under General I. I. Fedyuninsky, the 49th Army under General I. T. Grishin (whom I now met for the first time), the 5th Guards Tank Army under General V. T. Volsky, whom I had known since 1930, when he had commanded a regiment of the 7th Samara Cavalry Division. Later we had served together in the Transbaikal Army Group, where he had commanded a tank brigade. He was an excellent commander, a man of great education and high culture, tactful and brave, and I was confident that his army was in good hands.

By the beginning of the operation we had, together with the 3rd, 48th and 50th Armies, which had always belonged to the Second Byelorussian Front, seven field armies, one tank army, one air army (commanded by General K. A. Vershinin, who had shown himself an outstanding air force commander who possessed not only exceptional organising abilities but also a good supply of initiative) and, in addi-

tion, a cavalry corps, tank corps, mechanised corps and assault artillery. These were impressive forces; but so was the task we faced.

We were to operate on a frontage of some 250 kilometres. All along it our troops made a show of fortifying their positions, pretending to dig in for a prolonged defence, while, in fact, preparing full speed for the offensive.

We were to operate over extremely varied terrain. On the right, from Augustow to Lomza, was forest-and-lake country presenting considerable difficulties for troop movement. On the left the relief was more suitable for manoeuvre, but here we should have to overcome many lines of enemy defences, built and fortified over several years.

East Prussia had always been a springboard from which Germany had attacked her eastern neighbours; every brigand before embarking on a raid builds himself a strong refuge in case of failure. Over the ages a system of fortresses had been cultivated in the eastern part of Prussia as a springboard for attack or as a shelter in case of need. Now it was our task to batter down this wall, which had taken centuries to erect. In preparing for the offensive we also had to take into account the extremely unfavourable configuration of the frontline, with the enemy poised over our right flank. Since our main attack was to be delivered on our left wing, the right flank had to protect the main forces from possible enemy strikes from the north and, at the same time, move westward with them. Our right flank was already stretched thin. What would happen if our neighbour's advance slowed down? It might well be strained to breaking point. The boundary with the Third Byelorussian Front ran east to west from Augustow to Heilsberg. GHQ evidently expected our neighbour to advance abreast of us. But we had not even been informed where the Commander of the Third Byelorussian Front, I. D. Chernyakhovsky, was to deliver his main attack and, as I mentioned before, GHQ had failed to say anything about co-ordination on the right, evidently assuming that no complications could be expected on our northern flank.

In pursuance of GHQ's directives, we concentrated our main forces on the left wing. We had to take into account that, after breaking through the enemy defences on the Narew river, we would have to force the Vistula, which turned sharply north, crossing the whole attack zone of our main group. On penetrating the Narew positions we would

have to move as swiftly as possible to prevent the Germans from pulling back and occupying this line. At the same time, we had been directed to keep our strike group on the left wing sufficiently strong so as to be able to come to the help of the First Byelorussian Front in case of necessity. While not even mentioning the question of co-ordination on the right, GHQ had given categorical instructions concerning co-ordination with the First Byelorussian Front. This was understandable. The very boundary line between us, which passed from east to west along the Vistula up to Bromberg (Bydgoszcz) made our fronts closely interdependent: we were to protect our neighbour from enemy strikes from the north and facilitate his westward advance.

In preparing for the offensive we took due account of the special aspects of the operation. We had sufficient time and the plan was drawn up thoroughly, with the Front Command and Headquarters personnel, and subsequently the army commanders and chiefs of staffs, political chiefs, arm, logistical and service chiefs all taking an active part in the work. Consideration was given to all relevant views and suggestions. Special attention was paid to questions of co-ordination at army boundaries and the procedure for committing the Front's mobile formations and second echelons to action. The plan also provided for lateral troop and artillery manoeuvre, with details of air support.

The primary objective was to force the Vistula, a wide river, and we took steps to ensure that, immediately on breaking through the enemy defences on the Narew, all mobile crossing means should be sent on in the wake of the troops advancing towards the Vistula. Only the permanent wooden bridges built by our engineers at the bridgeheads would remain on the Narew. As in the advance in Byelorussia, we also provided for equipping our troops with all means necessary to facilitate movement through woody and marshy country. Fortunately, almost all of the Front's formations had seen action in Polesye area and had had considerable combat experience in such conditions.

The men, officers and political personnel were full of enthusiasm and eager to carry out the task. By this time we had a well-trained body of officers possessing a wealth of combat experience. The infantry commanders had learned to lead their units in all types of fighting: the arms and services commanders—artillery, tank, air, engineers, communications officers—were also up to the mark. The nation

had adequately provided the troops with the most up-to-date machines and materiel. Most of the NCOs and rank and files were seasoned men with battle experience, tried and tested in the hardships and vagaries of war. Now they were all filled with the sole desire to complete the enemy's defeat.

They were prepared to face difficulties and dangers, but it was our duty to do our best to protect the lives of these fine men. It is always a bitter experience to see men die in war, but it would be infinitely more bitter to lose them on the very threshold of victory, to lose heroes who had gone through terrible trials, marched thousands of kilometres under fire, and risked their lives for three and a half years to win the peace for their country. The commanders and political officers were instructed to do their best to fulfil their tasks with minimum losses, to protect the life of every man.

The Military Councils of the Front and armies, the political sections, the Party and Komsomol organisations, did everything to build up the men's morale to an even higher pitch and inspire them to perform the exploits required of them. Attaching great importance to initiative in battle, we publicised examples of resourcefulness displayed by the heroes of past battles. The Front newspaper, leaflets and talks by propagandists, were used to disseminate combat experience as widely as possible. And I must say that in the final, conclusive engagements our people displayed truly mass heroism. Heroism became a standard of behaviour which played a tremendous part in achieving victory, glorifying for all time the greatness of the Soviet soldier, with his boundless devotion to his people and his Soviet homeland.

As before, most of our units were understrength. Only the transfers from the GHQ Reserve—the 2nd Strike, 49th Field and 5th Tank Armies—were more or less fully manned. The other armies and separate formations had been replenished mainly by convalescents from Front and Army hospitals and medical battalions. Our medical personnel worked truly heroically to put the wounded back on their feet and enable them to return to the ranks. They have my deepest respect and gratitude for all they did.

We knew that we had a strong enemy before us and that his tenacity would increase as we penetrated deeper into his territory. It was important to keep our offensive from degenerating into protracted fighting, to make it swift and irre-

sistible, so that the enemy would be unable to conduct an orderly retreat and cling to advantageous lines. We therefore gave great attention to reconnaissance of the forward lines of the enemy defence, as well as the lines in depth, which the nazis could use in the retreat. The territory was repeatedly photographed from the air and all commanders were given aerial photographs of the ground on which their units were to operate. We singled out areas in the depth of the enemy's defence that were to be captured before the approach of our main forces. Specially designated mobile groups were given the task of bypassing enemy strongholds and breaking through to capture defiles, crossings and bridges on the enemy's routes and holding them until the approach of our troops. The Front air force was ordered to strike in support of these groups.

Strong advance groups for night operations were organised in the divisions. Their task was to prevent the enemy from disengaging from our forces under cover of night. These groups were to harass enemy forces at dusk and keep him tensed all night.

Our artillerymen, headed by the Front Artillery Chief, General A. K. Sokolsky, carried out a great deal of work to pick out and get the range of important targets in the zone of attack.

As mentioned before, the Front was to deliver its main attack on the left wing. Four field armies and one tank army were assigned for this. They were to advance in two echelons: the 48th, 2nd Strike, 65th and 70th in the first, and the 5th Tank Army in the second. Tank corps were attached to the 48th and 2nd Strike Armies to exploit the success on the main, Marienburg, sector, with a cavalry corps in the Front's reserve.

Two armies—the 50th on a broad front along the Augustow Canal from Augustow to Lomza, and the 3rd in closer battle formation north of Rożan—were deployed to ensure protection against possible enemy counterattacks from the north. Their task was to pin down enemy forces and prevent them from being transferred to the main line of advance. The 49th Army was placed in the second echelon with the task of exploiting the success when our troops started moving here.

In all these preparations I employed the system of staff work which had served me so well in the past. The operation was prepared by the collective effort of the personnel.

At headquarters we discussed all the plans before taking the final decisions, exchanged views on the utilisation and co-ordination of the various arms and services, and heard and discussed reports by officers from various formations. In this way all of the Front's commanders were kept constantly informed of events and could react quickly. We were thus able to avoid wasting time summoning department, arm and service chiefs, and listening to long, tiresome reports. Procedures that had seemed suitable in peacetime did not justify themselves in war. General A. N. Bogolyubov, the Front Chief of Staff, a very pedantic man, as a good staff officer should be, frowned at first at our apparent violation of established procedures, but later he conceded that my system was better suited to combat situations.

As I had expected, the Front's commanding officers were up to the mark. The Chief of Staff, Bogolyubov, had an excellent knowledge of staff work and did his job exemplarily, though at times he was rather sharp and cold with his subordinates. Generals N. Y. Subbotin and A. G. Russkikh, the Military Council Members, ably directed the work of the Front's political staff. General A. D. Okorokov, Chief of the Political Department, proved to be a man of really broad horizons, highly educated and an excellent organiser who enjoyed well-deserved prestige among the troops. General A. K. Sokolsky, the Artillery Chief, was a seasoned commander and a fine specialist with an excellent knowledge of his job. From our first meeting, and especially in the preparation for the operation, I found him to be a thoughtful, energetic and enterprising leader. General B. V. Blagoslavov, Chief of Front Engineers, enjoyed universal respect, as did the Communications Chief, General N. A. Borzov. It was a pleasure to be working in such a team, and I was confident that every one of my comrades would cope successfully with his tasks. This confidence was subsequently fully justified.

Every evening we gathered at headquarters to exchange ideas on the work carried out and discuss unsolved questions, suggested ways and means of eliminating shortcomings or changing whatever ran contrary to the conditions and the situation. In these meetings and conversations we got to know each other still better.

The date for the start of the operation was rapidly approaching, and we had our hands full. We were expecting replacements, but they were held up somewhere *en route*

owing to heavy railway traffic. All of a sudden we received directives from GHQ moving the date of the attack six days forward at the request of our Allies, who were in trouble in the Ardennes.

In pursuance of its obligations as an ally, the Soviet Government ordered its armies to launch the offensive to help the American and British forces in their difficulty. Yet how badly we needed those six days to complete our preparations! But it couldn't be helped, and we would certainly advance. The situation was aggravated by very bad weather. Thick mists shrouded the ground, depriving us of air support, which could have helped us greatly by suppressing enemy resistance with powerful strikes. We had to make radical adjustments in our offensive plans, relying for support on artillery alone. However, we were accustomed to having the artillerymen coming to the rescue in time of need.

GHQ fixed the deadline for the offensive: the morning of January 14 for the First and Second Byelorussian Fronts, and two days earlier—the 12th—for the First Ukrainian Front.

The command personnel spared no effort to prepare the troops for the operation despite the reduced time at their disposal; but the expected replacements failed to arrive on time.

It was planned to precede the attack with a ninety-minute artillery preparation, with a density of 200-240 guns and mortars per kilometre of frontage on the sector of the main effort. The infantry assault was to be accompanied by a rolling barrage and tanks would move in the infantry battle formations.

In previous offensives, just before the artillery preparation the enemy had sometimes withdrawn his forces in depth so as to make us waste ammunition on unmanned positions. This time, though, we hardly expected him to resort to such tactics. He had powerful positions abounding in strong points, permanent defence works and forts which, though of an outmoded type, were well adapted for defence. A voluntary withdrawal from such positions would only have facilitated our task, so he was unlikely to do any such thing. This meant we should have to pick the nazis out of their concrete burrows. We were strong enough for that, and now we were adequately supplied with artillery ammunition, thanks to the heroic efforts of the Soviet people to provide

their Armed Forces with everything needed to hasten victory. Our logistical personnel carried out a tremendous amount of work to provide the artillery positions with more than double the normal supply of gun and mortar shells.

On January 14, several hours before the beginning of the artillery preparation, I arrived together with the Military Council Members and the Front Artillery, Armour, Air and Engineers Chiefs at the Observation Post. Dawn had broken, but the terrain was hidden behind a shroud of mist and sleet, and the weathermen could promise no improvement. Meanwhile the scheduled time for the bombers to strike at the enemy's frontline was approaching. After a hurried consultation with K. A. Vershinin I ordered all air activities to be called off. Luckily, we had not counted too much on good weather, though we *had* hoped for air support up to the last moment.

The commanders concerned were duly informed of the change in plans and ordered to prepare for the variant providing for no air support.

Mist and snow continued to enshroud the positions, but this did not affect the general mood to proceed with the attack without waiting for the weather to clear.

At the appointed time I gave the signal, and several thousand guns and mortars and hundreds of rocket launchers opened fire.

An artillery preparation for an offensive may be organised in different ways, depending on the situation and the tasks facing the forces involved. The main thing, of course, is to overwhelm the enemy with artillery fire in the initial stages of the assault, demolish his system of defence and demoralise the defending troops. The infantry and tanks attacking in the wake of the rolling barrage had the task of penetrating the tactical depth, with the final breakthrough to be carried out by Army-level second echelons and mobile formations.

The mist grew denser and the snow came down thicker. A ceaseless rumble could be heard from the battlefield. The OP had communication with all the armies of the forward and second echelons, as well as with formations subordinated to the Front. We could receive all necessary information on the development of events at any time, but knowing from experience that in the initial stages of the fighting it is important not to distract the commanders from their tasks

of troop control, I forbade anyone to call them to telephone or telegraph. Besides, I was sure that if any commander needed help or had registered a major success he would call me up himself.

Even so, we were not left in ignorance of the development of events. Information trickled in from different sources, perhaps the most eloquent data coming from the artillery men, who directed their fire on requests from the infantry. We had a fairly clear idea of the general picture. In spite of the enemy's desperate opposition, our forces had driven wedges into his defences all along the front. It was proving hardest of all to knock the nazis out of fortified areas and centres of resistance, and all the army commanders took the correct decision to skirt such areas, leaving forces behind to block them.

Finally reports began to come in from the armies operating in the forward lines, indicating success along the whole frontage of the main effort. Within fifteen minutes of the beginning of the artillery preparation infantry had occupied the front-line enemy trenches almost without a skirmish. They had had to fight for the second line of trenches, but these too were overrun. With the advance in depth, though, enemy resistance had mounted steadily.

The thick mist prevented adequate utilisation of artillery support, and infantry attacked mainly in co-operation with armour and close-support artillery. In the latter part of the day the enemy began to counterattack, using tanks, but our forces continued to advance on all sectors. In the course of heavy fighting on the main line of advance the armies of the forward echelon—the 48th, 2nd Strike, 65th and 70th—failed to reach all the day's objectives, and penetrated only 5 to 8 kilometres into the enemy's defences. Batov's troops were more successful: D. F. Alexeyev's and K. M. Erastov's corps completed the penetration of the first line of the enemy defences, taking the Nasielsk strong point and enveloping the Pultusk fortified area. The attacks continued all through the night. The limited nature of the initial success was due to the grounding of our aircraft, the difficulties of artillery control and the limited possibilities of tank operation in dense mist. Thus, when the artillery preparation ended, the brunt of the battle fell on the infantry, which continued to batter the defences with the help of supporting artillery. Especially useful were the SU-76 self-propelled guns.

In the 50th Army's sector on the Front's right wing, Army Commander, I. V. Boldin, reported that the enemy was still in firm possession of his line along the Augustow Canal and repelling all attempts to dislodge him.

In the 3rd Army's sector, the troops succeeded, after the artillery preparation, in occupying two lines of trenches with few losses. By the end of the day they advanced 3 to 7 km against steadily mounting resistance.

Taking into account the shortcomings revealed in the course of the first day of fighting, we at Front HQ and the army commanders made some necessary adjustments to the operations plans. We refrained from committing our main forces, which had been earmarked to exploit the success. Ahead lay the difficult task of crossing the lower reaches of the Vistula, with its powerful riverside strongholds of Torn (Torun), Bromberg (Bydgoszcz), Graudenz (Grudziadz), Marienburg (Malbork) and Elbing (Elblag).

The enemy began the following morning with fierce counterattacks. Boldin reported that the enemy still firmly held the line along the Augustow Canal (the 50th Army, in fact, had not been assigned the task of breaking through the enemy defences: its task was to pin down enemy forces with activities on a broad front). Opposite the 3rd Army, the nazis, having brought up large forces during the night, launched an attack, throwing units of the Great Germany Panzer Division and fresh infantry units, supported by powerful artillery and mortar fire, into the battle. A. V. Gorbatov had the difficult task of repelling these strikes with what forces he had at his disposal. He held a sector of great importance both to us and to the enemy. If the enemy succeeded in breaking through, he would come out into the flank and rear of our whole strike force, and he battered the 3rd Army's lines furiously. To the credit of the Army's officers and men, they fought staunchly and repelled all the enemy's attempts to break through their positions. In these battles Alexander Gorbatov brilliantly distinguished himself, displaying skill in troop leadership; his subordinates showed great fighting ability and stamina.

On the sectors of the 48th, 2nd Strike, 65th and 70th Armies the enemy threw in all available forces in an attempt to patch up the breaches made in his defences. The nazis launched counterattack after counterattack of increasing ferocity, but were nevertheless compelled to relinquish their strongholds and defence areas one after another.

The weather did not improve and we were still unable to bring in aircraft, even single planes, to help our infantry and armour.

We had good news from our left-hand neighbour, and M. S. Malinin, Chief of Staff of the First Byelorussian Front, concluded his report with the words,

"What are you marking time there for? Our tanks are already approaching Berlin!"

Well, Berlin was a joke, of course, but by the end of the second day of the offensive the tank armies *had* advanced substantially.

By contrast, we had no information whatsoever concerning the state of affairs on our right-hand neighbour's sector. Only Boldin reported that the adjacent left-flank army of the Third Byelorussian Front was still holding the defences on its former line from Augustow to the north.

Reluctantly I was forced to throw the tank corps into action in the zone of the 48th, 2nd Strike and 65th Armies to accelerate the penetration of the enemy defences. The enemy, his strength sapped by counterattacks, collapsed under this blow. His line of defence was breached on the main line of advance and our troops poured into the gap, heading for Bromberg, Graudenz and Marienburg.

The third day of the operation saw the 3rd Army still beating off attacks by the nazis, who were intent on reaching their objectives in this sector at all costs. In the afternoon of January 16, the weather began to improve and we were able to bring out our air force, which gave the Army considerable support in repelling enemy attacks. Some of the forces of the 49th Army were committed to action on the boundary between the 50th and 3rd Armies, which substantially improved the situation on that sector, helping Gorbatov's troops to carry on the offensive; by evening they had advanced five kilometres, having brilliantly carried out their task.

In three days of intense fighting the forces of the Second Byelorussian Front had broken through the enemy's defences along the whole front from Lomza to the mouth of the River Narew, with the exception of the 50th Army zone, where the enemy continued to fight back. As planned, on the morning of January 17, the 5th Guards Tank Army was brought up from the Front's second echelon and thrown into the breach in the 48th Army's zone of advance. Supported by specially assigned bomber and fighter air formations, the

tanks raced towards Marienburg, sweeping aside and destroying enemy units attempting to resist them. Simultaneously, the 3rd Guards Cavalry Corps under the command of seasoned, energetic General N. S. Oslikovsky, entered the gap in the direction of Allenstein (Olsztyn).

The 48th and 2nd Strike Armies continued to advance in the wake of the tanks with the object of crossing the Vistula in their stride, before the enemy had a chance of digging in on the opposite bank.

The operation was developing in full accord with the GHQ directive.

ON TWO FRONTS

On January 20, 1945, when our forces were already approaching the Vistula and preparing to effect a swift crossing, GHQ ordered the 3rd, 48th and 2nd Strike Armies and the 5th Guards Tank Army to turn north and northeast against the enemy grouping in East Prussia.

The order came as a complete surprise. It meant a total change of our plans, which had been based on the GHQ directive of November 28, 1944, setting the Second Byelorussian Front the following task:

"Assume the offensive and rout the enemy's Mlawa group; not later than the 10th-11th day of the offensive, occupy the line Myszinec, Willenberg, Neidenburg, Dzialdowo, Bezun, Belsk, Plock and continue to advance in the general direction of Nowe Mjasto, Marienburg.

"Deliver the main attack from the Rożan bridgehead with the forces of four field armies, one tank army, one tank and one mechanised corps in the general direction of Pszasnysz, Mlawa, Lidzbark. Protection of main forces on the north is to be ensured by the advance of one field army on Myszinec.

"Deliver secondary attack with forces of two field armies and one tank corps from the Serock bridgehead in the general direction of Nasielsk, Belsk. To assist the First Byelorussian Front in routing the enemy's Warsaw group, the Second Byelorussian Front is to assign forces for a strike aimed at enveloping Modlin from the west."

The whole directive, like the personal instructions of the Supreme Commander, provided for close co-ordination between the Second and First Byelorussian Fronts. It testifies irrefutably that the Second Byelorussian Front had been assigned an important part in what has come to be known as the Vistula-Oder Operation. Yet all histories of the war for some reason say nothing of our Front's participation in this operation, presenting the matter as though from the

very outset of the offensive, that is, from January 14, 1945, the Second Byelorussian Front had been assigned to attack and defeat the enemy's East Prussian group.

The fact that our main forces were turned north on January 20 is proof of the flexibility of the GHQ leadership. As soon as they saw that the Third Byelorussian Front was lagging behind they made adjustments to the original plan. True, such a contingency could and should have been provided for in advance.

Since Stalingrad, GHQ and the General Staff had shown great skill in planning large-scale strategic campaigns with the participation of several fronts. However, I cannot say this of the East Prussian campaign, and I think there were many errors of judgment in the way it was organised.

In my view the wrong sector had been chosen for Chernyakhovsky's main attack. The General Staff could not have been ignorant of the fact that the strongest fortifications in Prussia were located in the eastern and southeastern areas, where it would be very difficult to break through the enemy defences. Besides, the very configuration of the front-line suggested that the main attack ought to be delivered from south to north. It would have been better to start the offensive from the Lomza line in the direction of the Frisches Haff bay. Such a strike would have been additionally favoured by the fact that it would have combined better with the operations of our Front and would have made it much easier to penetrate the enemy defences (especially if our 50th and 3rd Armies, deployed there, had been handed over to Chernyakhovsky together with their zones). This, however, was not done. More, the GHQ directive failed to say a word about any participation of forces of the Second Byelorussian Front in the Third Byelorussian's operations against the East Prussian group. And now our main task was to be precisely that of surrounding the East Prussian group with a strike by the Front's main forces to the north and northeast, aimed at reaching the Frisches Haff.

At the same time, we were not relieved of our previous task of co-operation with the First Byelorussian Front on the flank and had to continue the offensive westward, although we had only two armies left on that sector. Naturally, our advance slowed down, we lagged behind Zhukov even more and he was compelled to assign special forces to protect his exposed flank on the north. He even rebuked me for not providing adequate assistance, though I have no doubt

that he fully realised that this was hardly my fault and voiced his dissatisfaction with the sole aim of spurring me on.

Having turned to the north and northeast, we advanced fairly rapidly towards the sea. To hold us up the enemy began transferring forces from the southern sector of his defence along the Augustow Canal, leaving the canal only a weak covering force. The 50th Army Command failed to detect this manoeuvre in time and continued to report to the Front HQ that the enemy was still firmly entrenched. Only two days later a reconnaissance in force revealed that the 50th Army was unopposed and the last small nazi groups were hastily withdrawing to the north. This was an unforgivable oversight on the part of the Army Commander and General I. P. Ozerov, the Chief of Staff, was ordered to take over his command. I mention all this because it is misrepresented in certain other works.

The incorrect information cost us dear. The 49th Army which could otherwise have been much more usefully employed, had to be committed to action too early. And the 50th Army had to carry out forced marches to overtake the disengaged enemy.

On January 20, the 3rd Army crossed the Polish border in pursuit of the enemy and entered East Prussia, where they carried by storm a strongly fortified line built long before the war. We found there full-size cement-walled trenches, bunkers, wire entanglements, pillboxes, artillery caponiers, shelters. But our troops' advance was so swift that the enemy had no time to occupy and hold the line and the men of the 3rd Army took it almost in their stride. Units of the 48th Army were also advancing successfully, skirting areas where the enemy had managed to organise his defence.

N. S. Oslikovsky's cavalry corps ranged far ahead and tore into Allenstein (Olsztyn), where several trainloads of panzers and artillery had only just arrived. Attacking daringly (not on horseback, of course!) and stunning the enemy with a hurricane of artillery and machine-gun fire, the cavalrymen captured the trains, which turned out to be full of enemy units transferred from the east to close the breach made by our troops.

Stubborn fighting ensued, with enemy units coming up to the town from the east and northeast. Our cavalry and the

tank crews supporting them would have been caught in a tight corner but for the timely approach of the 48th Army. Routing the enemy, the cavalry and infantry captured much equipment and several thousand prisoners. At Allenstein the Front's troops overcame the second line of the fortified area, and the road into East Prussia lay open.

The 5th Guards Tank Army was thrown into the breach and raced for the sea, scattering enemy units and giving them no time to dig in. The tanks bypassed strong points, leaving them to the units of the 48th and 2nd Strike Armies following in their wake. On January 25, forward units of the Tank Army reached the Frisches Haff at Tolkemito (Tolkmicko). They were followed on the next day by the main forces, which blocked Elbing, cutting off the enemy's lines of retreat from East Prussia to the west.

The 2nd Strike Army stormed the powerful defence system on the approaches to Marienburg, an ancient fortress of the Teutonic Knights, and on January 25 reached the rivers Vistula and Nogat, forcing them in several places and gaining footholds on the other bank. The troops, however, were unable to take Elbing in one rush. A tank unit that had broken into the city was surrounded and could not be relieved. The men fought gallantly to the last shell, to the last bullet, and all died there like heroes.

General Fedyuninsky was compelled to mount a full-scale assault and the fighting lasted several days, before the 2nd Strike Army succeeded in carrying the city.

Units of the 65th Army continued to exploit the success and, allowing the enemy no time to dig in on the advantageous lines presented by numerous rivers and streams, reached the Vistula and proceeded to force a crossing. On some sectors the enemy had had no opportunity to organise his defences and only slight forces held the lines. This was due to the fact that—thanks to the organisation of detachments specially trained for night activities—the pursuit had been carried on day and night without respite.

As we had expected, Graudenz, a fortress with a permanent garrison, repelled the first attacks of the 65th Army units. The enemy held a large bridgehead on the eastern bank of the Vistula, and our troops had failed to make a quick leap across, north of the city. Now they had to fight their way over.

In its lower reaches the Vistula is more than 400 metres wide, with depths of six metres and more. A thaw had set

in and the ice was getting weaker. It could still carry infantry but artillery and machines needed special crossings, which could not be erected without footholds on the western bank. Batov's troops proceeded to fight for such footholds.

The 70th Army, advancing parallel and to the left of them, threw back enemy units, enveloped the large strongly fortified town of Torn on the northern bank of the Vistula, and also proceeded to effect a crossing.

Clearly, the enemy had decided to try and halt us on the Vistula line at all costs. Our air reconnaissance spotted considerable movements of troops coming up from the west and northwest. This was confirmed by the mounting resistance.

In the circumstances, I was rather worried about the enemy forces locked up in Torn. According to a report from the 70th Army Commander, V. S. Popov, they were some 5,000 strong, and they had refused to surrender. When I learned that the city was besieged by only one division—and by then our divisions were sadly undermanned—I advised Popov to treat the enemy with caution. Torn was already some distance in our rear and this hornets' nest had to be got rid of. I ordered Popov to take steps to wipe out the nazi garrison as quickly as possible if it refused to surrender.

After supper a group of generals gathered at our HQ. Among those present were N. Y. Subbotin, A. G. Russkikh, A. K. Sokolsky, P. I. Kotov-Legonkov and N. A. Borzov. A little later our Logistics Chief, I. M. Lagunov, arrived. He immediately took up the question of Torn—an unpleasant thorn in the flesh of our logistical services.

"Several civilian inhabitants have come over to us," he said. "They say the town is swarming with soldiers, panzers, armoured cars and artillery."

"Where did you detain these people?"

"Why, no one detained them. They came themselves to the village where our hospital is located. They said they had encountered no Soviet troops on the way. The hospital chief called me up. He's very alarmed."

We were discouraged by the news and began discussing how to rout the garrison without destroying the city in the process.

At that moment I was urgently called to the telephone by Popov, who reported that the enemy had broken through the encirclement and was advancing towards Graudenz, where crossings were held by the nazis. The Germans had a large

force while Popov had none ready to hand, and he asked permission to shift his CP, which the enemy was approaching. Where to? Popov named a village some distance from his own forces. That meant the situation was really serious. I permitted him to move to the nearest division and ordered him to take all necessary steps to destroy the enemy.

"Meanwhile I'll instruct Batov to ferry two divisions to the eastern bank of the Vistula. Blagoslavov will alert his sapper and pontoon elements."

While this conversation was going on I had Batov called up. When he received the instructions he said he would supplement the two divisions with a regiment from the eastern bank and two battalions of rocket launchers.

At the same time Lagunov ordered his units in the rear to be on the alert and keep up reconnaissance in the direction of the enemy breakthrough.

All that remained now was to check up on execution of the orders, and our staff got down to this work.

The enemy group that had broken out of Torn was evidently in contact with the nazi command, as German units in the Graudenz area simultaneously resumed activities, attacking our forces on the Vistula.

We halted the enemy 10 kilometres from the river. The fighting lasted several days. The enemy group breaking out of the encirclement numbered over 30,000 well armed officers and men, with armoured cars, troop carriers, several panzers and artillery.

This incident served as an object lesson to us for the future. For long afterwards Vasily Popov could not forgive himself for having so underrated the enemy.

Enemy attempts to push our units off the western bank into the Vistula failed. They held the bridgeheads firmly, expanding them as new forces crossed over.

A corps of the 49th Army also took part in repelling the nazis attacking the 65th Army on the western bank and gave Batov considerable assistance.

When the right wing of the Second Byelorussian Front reached Elbing (the 2nd Strike Army) and the Frisches Haff and Tolkemito (the 5th Guards Tank Army), the enemy's East Prussian group was completely cut off from the rest of Germany. On the night of January 26, assembling no less than seven infantry and one panzer divisions, the enemy struck a blow from the neighbourhood of Heilsberg in the direction of Elbing, where fighting was still going on. At

great cost, he succeeded in pushing units of the 48th Army some 20 km to the west.

I well remember that night. At dusk a fierce blizzard sprang up, with gusts of wind occasionally reaching hurricane force. We were all assembled at headquarters when a signaller brought a telegram from the 48th Army Commander, N. I. Gusev, reporting that powerful enemy forces were advancing and that he doubted whether his own troops would be capable of containing their westward pressure.

Knowing Gusev only too well as an intelligent and experienced general, we realised that, once he had raised the alarm, the danger was real. We went into action at once, rushing a substantial portion of the forces of the 5th Guards Tank Army, the 8th Tank and 3rd Guards Cavalry Corps into the breach. At the same time instructions were issued to the 2nd Strike Army Commander to turn the part of his forces deployed at and south of Elbing to the east with the task of denying the enemy an approach to the Vistula, should he succeed in breaking through our positions at any point.

The 5th Tank Army Commander, General Volsky, called up to report that the enemy was approaching his CP and requested permission to shift his headquarters to within the 2nd Strike Army positions. I advised him not to get too far away from his units and prepare them instead to strike at the enemy, maintaining constant liaison with Fedyuninsky. Without further ado Volsky proceeded to carry out orders. A little while later units of the 3rd Guards Cavalry Corps galloped by our CP, hurrying towards the breach. These Guards cavalrymen had been alerted and had already reached us from north of Allenstein. Oslikovsky popped in to report that his men were ready for battle and eager to tackle the enemy. The forward regiment, already in the field of operations, had established contact with the 48th Army. We wished Oslikovsky luck and he galloped off to lead his troops.

A report came in that the 8th Tank Corps was taking up its positions.

Just in case, we kept our Command Post in readiness for action. The soldiers and officers of the service units took up perimeter defence positions in the stone buildings surrounding us. We were in a good position to fight.

Meanwhile the blizzard continued. More snow fell and the wind piled up huge drifts. In such conditions cavalry

enjoyed a tremendous advantage over infantry, and left it far behind.

The blizzard, however, was as bad for the enemy as for us, and hampered his operations enormously. He was unable to fight his way through the villages firmly held by units of the 48th Army, and when he tried to bypass them his machines and artillery got stuck in the snow. The commander of one of the 48th Army's divisions displayed valuable initiative. This division had been holding a town, where several important roads crossed. On receiving a report that the enemy was approaching, the division commander organised all-round defence, straddling all the roads. The enemy stormed the town with a fury born of despair, but was unable to get through. At dawn the nazis tried to skirt the town, abandoning machines and artillery in the deep snow. But by this time our main forces arrived. Attacked on three sides, the enemy was routed. Our troops captured a vast amount of equipment and over 20,000 prisoners. All arms distinguished themselves in the engagement, but top honours must certainly go to the men of N. S. Oslikovsky's 3rd Guards Cavalry Corps, who came to the rescue of the beleaguered units of the 48th Army in the nick of time.

Long before entering German territory, the Front's Military Council had discussed the question of our people's behaviour on German soil. The nazi occupation forces had inflicted so much suffering on Soviet people, they had perpetrated such terrible crimes that our soldiers were filled with a legitimate and understandably fierce hatred for the enemy. However, it was our duty to prevent this legitimate hatred from degenerating into blind revenge against the whole German nation. Our war was with Hitler's army, not the civilian population of Germany. And when our troops crossed the German frontier the Front Military Council issued an Order of the Day congratulating our men and commanders on this portentous event and reminding them that we were entering Germany, too, as liberators. The Red Army had come to help the German people get rid of the nazi clique and its poisonous propaganda. The Military Council called upon all our officers and men to maintain the highest discipline and uphold the honour of the Soviet soldier.

The line and political officers, all Party and Komsomol activists continuously explained to the men the essence

of the Soviet Army's mission of liberation, its responsibility for the destinies of Germany, and for the fate of all the other countries we would liberate from the nazi yoke.

I must say that on German soil our people displayed genuine human kindness and magnanimity.

The Soviet offensive that had begun in January 1945 progressed successfully and swiftly. If a lull set in at one sector, it was countered by increased activities at another. The whole vast front from the Baltic Sea to the Carpathian Mountains had been set in motion.

The Soviet Army dealt the enemy a crushing blow, breaking up 1,200 kilometres of powerful defence lines that had been erected over a period of several years.

Only a blind man could fail to see that the war was lost for nazi Germany, and Hitler and his aides realised this as well as anyone else. But they still cherished the hope of obtaining some relief by political manoeuvring, and did all they could to postpone the final reckoning. Whereas in starting the war the nazi command's worst fears had been of its prolongation, now this had become their main objective. Hitler issued special orders obliging the troops to hold every line and every city to the last bullet, to risk encirclement but not retreat, pinning down as many Soviet forces as possible. Violators of this order were threatened with the death penalty. We had ample opportunity to see how nazi fanatics had put this order into effect, though now nothing could save them from the imminent catastrophe.

Our troops had entered Eastern Pomerania, encountering desperate resistance there. The enemy had concentrated substantial forces. According to data obtained by the Front Intelligence Department, headed by General I. V. Vinogradov, a past-master at his job, the German troops deployed in Eastern Pomerania had been marshalled into the Army Group Vistula commanded by Himmler. It numbered more than 30 divisions, eight of them panzers.

On his maritime flank the enemy made extensive use of coastal and naval artillery to support his ground forces. We had information that the nazi command was taking steps to transfer troops to Eastern Pomerania by sea from the Kurland and East Prussian groups.

To organise his defence the enemy exploited the favourable terrain, which abounded in forests, marshes, big and small lakes and rivers, most of them joined by canals.

With great difficulty our troops smashed through one line after another. A thaw provided a further hindrance to operations. But the main trouble was the numerical weakness of our troops.

The enemy was able to field more men than we could and if, notwithstanding, we succeeded in advancing, this was solely due to the skill of the commanders and mass heroism of the soldiers. Our units had been on the offensive for a month already. They had been understrength at the outset. Now they were little more than token forces. No matter how we juggled them we were unable to achieve superiority in strength and combat means on individual sectors, and without this we could not penetrate the enemy's defences. The fighting was stubborn, but all we succeeded in achieving was to push the enemy back here and there, thus further extending our frontage. Our forces became even more dispersed, but still we were unable to close the gap between our left wing and the right wing of the First Byelorussian Front.

As a result of heavy fighting, units of the Front's left flank had advanced 60 kilometres, and there they were halted. The enemy counterattacked more and more frequently, and we repelled him with difficulty.

The overall situation was very complicated, with half of the Front's troops facing eastward against the East Prussian group and the other half advancing to the west. We strained to our utmost to keep abreast of our left-hand neighbour, but he was already approaching the Oder on the Küstrin direction and we just couldn't keep up. With the fighting still going on, we redeployed some forces from the right wing to the left, managed to push forward a little more, and then ground to a halt, completely exhausted.

As of February 10, the situation on the Second Byelorussian Front was as follows: the 2nd Strike Army, with three attached fortified areas, held positions along the Nogat and Vistula rivers, and at the same time had pushed northward against enemy forces defending the Vistula line and stormed the Graudenz fortress with its large garrison. To the left, facing north, the 65th Army had advanced, with the 49th Army still farther to the left and, finally, the 70th Army, reinforced with a tank and a mechanised corps, was advancing to the northwest on a wide front. We urgently appealed to GHQ for replacements and were promised a field army and a tank corps. This was not very much, but we awaited

them impatiently, planning to use them for a strike on our left flank. Their arrival, however, was delayed.

Meanwhile the First Byelorussian Front's main forces, already fighting for bridgeheads on the Oder, remained poorly protected on the north, from the direction of Eastern Pomerania.

German officers taken prisoner in the neighbourhood of Chojnice stated that the nazi command was preparing to strike with large forces at the flank of the Soviet forces that had reached the Oder. With this threat in mind, at the beginning of February we substantially reinforced our own left flank so as to be in a position to come to the help of the First Byelorussian Front. We pulled the 49th Army out from the right wing, transferring it to the left, and brought up the 330th and 369th Infantry Divisions from the Front reserve. The 3rd Guards Cavalry Corps was also shifted from the right to the left flank, but kept in the Front reserve. Artillery, too, was redeployed, with two assault artillery divisions, one division and three separate brigades of rocket launchers, two antitank brigades, two corps artillery brigades, two anti-aircraft artillery divisions and other units transferred to the left wing. General Sokolsky and his assistants took the necessary steps to ensure that this artillery was ready for action.

We were worse off with tank units. They had lost many machines in hard, protracted fighting, and what machines they had were in need of repairs. General Chernyavsky, the Front Armour Chief, and his staff organised the repair of damaged tanks. Working under fire, the crews and repairmen removed them from the battlefield. Their selfless labour gave a new lease of life to tens and hundreds of fighting machines, which we used to replenish the tank and mechanised corps sent to reinforce the left wing.

On February 10, before we had completed our regrouping, we received a GHQ directive instructing us to hand over the 50th, 3rd and 48th Armies and 5th Guards Tank Army to the Third Byelorussian Front. The Second Byelorussian was thus relieved of participation in the mopping-up operations against the East Prussian enemy group and ordered to continue with its initial task and advance in the general direction of Bublitz (Bobolice) in co-operation with the First Byelorussian Front.

This was undoubtedly a correct decision. With the East Prussian group isolated, there was no purpose in having two

army groups dealing with it. The Third Byelorussian Front was able to cope with the task alone and it was right to give it all the forces committed to action in East Prussia.

But what was our position now? We had been hard pressed as it was; now we had been deprived of half our strength, including such a powerful strike force as the 5th Tank Army!

EASTERN POMERANIA

The fighting grew fiercer. By February 19, the 65th, 49th and 70th Armies had succeeded in pushing the enemy back northwards and northwestwards only 15 to 40 kilometres, reaching the line Mene, Cieh, Chojnice, where they were forced to stop. The First Byelorussian Front had also been unable to advance any farther. Its 2nd Guards Cavalry Corps, adjacent to us, had halted on the Landsk, Rederitz line. The Polish 1st Army was in action on the Deutsh, Fuhlbeck, Kallke line and fierce fighting was going on in its rear with enemy units surrounded in Schneidemühl, Deutsch Krone and Arnswalde. The enemy thus continued to hold Pomerania firmly.

I was called to the telephone by the Chief of the General Staff, A. M. Vasilevsky, who told me of Zhukov's intention to launch an offensive against the enemy's East Pomeranian group for the purpose of liquidating the threat to the First Byelorussian Front's flank, and asked me what action the Second Byelorussian Front would undertake in this case. I said that the best thing would be to strike a blow from our left flank to coincide with our neighbour's main attack. This would open the way to the sea and cut the enemy group in two, after which our Front could deal with the eastern segment and our neighbour with the western.

Vasilevsky said that this coincided completely with his idea of the campaign. I remarked that the best thing would be for both fronts to strike simultaneously, and Vasilevsky promised he would see to this.

The variant providing for a joint strike by the forces of the two fronts at the centre of the East Pomeranian group was a radical solution of the task of eliminating the threat from the north and it could hasten the beginning of the Berlin operation.

The disposition of our Front's forces was such that no additional regrouping was required other than the transfer to our left flank of the 19th Army and a tank corps we were

receiving from the GHQ Reserve. The staff got on with this work at once.

In our accounts of events of the last war we are often prone to forget the great part played by the workers of the Front and Army logistical services. A few words must now be said about these tireless toilers, with particular reference to this very complicated operation.

I could not help admiring the energy of Lieutenant-General I. M. Lagunov and all the officers of the Front Logistics Department under his command. Our supply lines were badly extended, with the Front's rear echelons stretching back nearly 300 kilometres. Most of the Front's depots were located even beyond this area. Communication with them was hampered by the difference in the gauge of Russian and German tracks. Then there was the Vistula and scores of smaller rivers. The nazis had demolished all bridges, and cargoes had to be shipped over temporary crossings. The break-up of the ice and the rising spring flood waters made it difficult to restore and build bridges. The spring thaw made roads already churned up by shells and bombs impassable.

Meanwhile the offensive continued unabated and all supplies had to be brought up continuously. In spite of the tremendous difficulties they faced, the rear services had ensured the Front with continuous supplies of everything needed. Their personnel were inexhaustibly inventive. They had laid a pipeline to accelerate fuel deliveries across the Vistula. They had managed to dovetail rail and motor transport operations. They had ensured the rapid manoeuvring of Front and Army depots and hospitals and lost no time reorganising logistical work when the changing situation at the front demanded it. Thanks to their efforts there had been no interruptions in supplies throughout the whole operation.

Having temporarily halted the offensive on the main sector, we were awaiting the approach of the 19th Army and 3rd Tank Corps, making use of the respite to bring up ammunition and fuel.

Steps were taken to find out what enemy forces opposed us. They included formations of the 2nd Field Army, notably two panzer and 14 infantry divisions, four infantry brigades, two combat groups, four separate infantry regiments, and 15 separate infantry battalions. Their total strength amounted to about 230,000 officers and men, 700 tanks and self-

propelled guns, 300 armoured troop carriers, 20 armoured trains, 3,360 guns and mortars (not counting coastal defence and fort artillery) and more than 300 fighting aircraft of various types. In addition, we could expect the nazis to transfer up to five infantry divisions from Kurland; according to reconnaissance data, units of the 126th, 290th, 225th and 93rd Infantry Divisions from the Army Group Kurland were already *en route*.

The First Byelorussian Front HQ informed us that facing their right wing, which was turned north, were units of the enemy 11th Army, including eight infantry, three motorised, four panzer and one field air division, two panzer brigades and four separate panzer battalions with supporting means—altogether some 200,000 officers and men, 700 tanks and self-propelled guns, 2,500 guns and mortars and up to 300 aircraft.

This information concerning enemy strength, confirmed by reconnaissance and POW statements, led us to the conclusion that the enemy had substantial forces in Eastern Pomerania, and they could be expected to increase daily.

Our troops had by then overcome the main lines of the Pomeranian defence system, which the enemy had built in advance, but the terrain enabled the nazis to improvise new powerful defences, turning stone buildings and whole villages into strong centres of resistance.

The terrain and the spring mud restricted the attacking forces' possibilities of manoeuvre to hard surface roads, which the enemy mined and blocked with felled trees, barricades and other obstacles.

It was clear that the nazi command had decided to use the East Pomeranian group to hold up our advance on Berlin. We knew by this time that the nazi leadership were concentrating their efforts against the Soviet Army at the cost of deliberately weakening the Western front and that they were already seeking ways of striking a deal with the governments of the United States and Great Britain and concluding a separate peace.

It was imperative for us to hasten the German defeat in Eastern Pomerania and make as many forces as possible available for the decisive strike against Berlin. To this end GHQ decided to pool the efforts of the two fronts against the East Pomeranian group. According to the GHQ directive, the Second and First Byelorussian Fronts were to push

their adjacent flanks northward, in the general direction of Kolberg (Kolobrzeg), the boundary between the fronts passing through Linde, Neustettin, Kolberg. When the enemy group was split in two, the Second Byelorussian Front would have the task of mopping up the eastern pocket, taking Danzig (Gdansk) and Gdynia, coming out to the Gulf of Gdansk, while the First Byelorussian Front pursued the enemy in the western part of Pomerania, advancing towards the River Oder. On reaching the Baltic coast the forces of one Front would thus turn east, and those of the other, west.

According to the directive, our Front had to start the offensive on its left flank on February 24. This created additional difficulties for us. In transferring the 19th Army and 3rd Tank Corps to us from its reserve, GHQ must have known that they would hardly be able to reach us by the deadline, and there would be no time to prepare them for the operation.

Still, we spared no effort to launch the operation on time. The forces of the 19th Army were still on the march when its commanding personnel arrived at the sector on which it was to operate (still held by units of the First Byelorussian Front). Details were worked out on the spot and co-ordination procedures with the 3rd Tank Corps and reinforcing units were agreed upon. The Front arms chiefs, Sokolsky, Chernyavsky and Borzov, and the 4th Air Army Commander, Vershinin, also took part in this work.

On the night of February 21, the 19th Army replaced the right-flank units of the First Byelorussian Front, occupied the line of departure and proceeded to prepare for the offensive. It was to deliver its main attack in the direction Bischofswalde, Schtegere, Baldenburg. An artillery concentration of no less than 150 tubes per kilometre of frontage, not counting rocket launchers, was to be created to soften the enemy defences. This could be achieved thanks to the reinforcing means the Army had received from the Front. The attack was supported by the main forces of the 4th Air Army, whose representatives were assigned to the 19th Army Commander and the commanders of the other formations with which the air force was to co-operate.

Although our forces were to launch the attack on February 24, fighting actually began on the 22nd, the enemy forestalling us and attacking all along the front in the hope of dislodging our units. Fierce fighting flared up on all

sectors, luckily with the exception of the sector where the 19th Army was replacing units of the First Byelorussian Front.

The enemy steadily built up pressure, but on our right wing the 2nd Strike Army firmly held its position. I. I. Fedyuninsky, meanwhile, kept a part of his forces battering at the enemy group surrounded in the town and fortress of Graudenz, which, according to POW statements, contained up to 15,000 officers and men. P. I. Batov's 65th Army repelled all enemy attacks, but the enemy succeeded in forcing back the 49th Army and even took Ossowo. However, we could not blame the Army Commander, as we had removed an infantry corps from here to reinforce our left flank, correspondingly weakening his forces. At present this corps was beating off enemy attacks in the neighbourhood of Chojnice, together with the 70th Army, and preparing for the offensive.

Actually, we were quite pleased by the enemy's show of activity, as he was attacking at some distance from the zone where we were preparing our main attack. The more troops he pulled out of there, the easier it would be for us to overthrow him on the line of the main effort. All armies were therefore given orders to increase their pressure against the enemy.

As the continuous, albeit slow, advance of our troops had prevented the enemy from organising strong fortified defences, we counted on breaking through them with infantry divisions alone, supported by a powerful artillery strike. We had few tanks. Our only really full-strength formation was the 3rd Tank Corps, which we decided to commit to action on the main line of advance on the second day of the offensive.

In the morning of February 24, after a 40-minute artillery preparation, the 19th Army attacked the enemy. It quickly occupied the forward positions and, overcoming enemy resistance, pushed forward, expanding the breach in depth and breadth.

The nazis fought for every strong point and counter-attacked, but they were outfought and outmanoeuvred.

As the 19th Army advanced, its left flank was laid bare and the enemy tried to exploit this. We were forced to throw in the 3rd Guards Cavalry Corps, which deployed to the left of the attacking troops, protecting their flank.

Penetrations into the enemy's rear always require tenacity and courage. On that day our men and their commanders performed thousands of feats of valour. Heroism, initiative, mutual assistance helped them break up enemy fortifications and destroy counterattacking panzers and infantry. By the end of the day the 19th Army had advanced 10-12 kilometres. expanding the breach to 20 kilometres in width.

Our success was substantial, though it could have been greater if the infantry had been supported by tanks. The fighting demonstrated that without close armour support infantry units could not advance fast enough; accordingly, I decided to commit the 3rd Tank Corps to action before our units had reached the designated line.

On February 25, at 1100 hours, General A. P. Panfilov led his tanks into the 19th Army's attack zone with the purpose of striking northward towards Geglenfeld, Fernheide, completing the penetration of the enemy defences jointly with infantry, and by the end of the day reaching the line Eikwir-Schönau. The 313th Infantry Division was attached to the corps, and an infantry regiment advanced with each tank brigade of the forward echelon.

Forward units of the 3rd and 18th Guards Tank Brigades with tank-borne submachine-gunners overtook the infantry and rumbled ahead. By 1400 hrs they reached the line Elsenau, Beirenhutte, completing the penetration of the enemy's tactical defence zone. The rapid tanks' advance was facilitated by the courage and resourcefulness of a forward patrol led by Senior Lieutenant Nesen. By a swift, daring strike this armoured patrol captured a bridge over a marshy river, thereby ensuring the success of the whole brigade. This is only one example of the bold initiative displayed by Lieutenant Nesen's men.

After their breakthrough, the tanks stepped up the tempo of their advance. Overpowering enemy security units and skirting strong points, which were left for the attached infantry to deal with, they advanced 40 kilometres in one day. In the morning of February 26, the corps' advance detachments carried Baldenburg and the town and railway station of Schönau, where they routed a large enemy group, taking huge stocks of equipment and many prisoners.

The swift and resolute action of the tankmen led by General A. P. Panfilov, a fine commander, paved the way for the 19th Army's rapid advance. Unfortunately, however,

the Army did not exploit the opportunity, and in two days advanced only 25 kilometres. The fighting to force the enemy out of strong points left behind by the tanks consumed much time and energy. This doubtlessly told on the rate of advance, but it was not the only reason, and poor leadership was also to blame. Time and again the Army Commander, G. K. Kozlov, lost contact with his formations and was slow in taking essential decisions. Two days' fighting revealed that he was incapable of handling such a large formation as an army, to say nothing of the attached reinforcing units. In the complex and extremely fluid situation of the offensive he was at a loss and incapable of influencing the course of events.

This compelled the Front Military Council, with the sanction of the Supreme Commander, to replace the Army Commander with V. Z. Romanovsky, a seasoned, experienced general with good all-round abilities.

On the first day of the offensive poor weather deprived us of air support, but on February 25, General Vershinin brought in his attack aircraft and bombers, which gave great help to our troops, especially the tanks. In one day of operations over the zones of the 19th Army and the Guards Tank Corps they carried out 960 sorties.

Fighting developed along the whole front. The 70th Army (the 19th's neighbour on the right), repelling strong enemy attacks, assumed the offensive and by evening of February 25, advanced up to 6 kilometres on its left flank. The 49th Army was still resisting the attacking enemy and preventing him from making further headway from Ossowo. The 65th was beating back enemy attacks on its old lines. The situation remained unchanged in the 2nd Strike Army's zone, where the enemy had repulsed all its attacks; nor had the Army as yet taken the besieged garrison in Graudenz.

The sustained fighting provided confirmation of the enemy's intention to hold on to Eastern Pomerania at all costs. Information reaching us at Front HQ indicated that on no sector did enemy forces show any signs of weakening. On the contrary, I. I. Fedyuninsky and I. T. Grishin reported that new enemy units had appeared opposite their armies. We were not discouraged by this, however, as it suggested that the enemy had as yet failed to realise the magnitude of the threat posed by our strike group. In fact, we were extremely pleased and took urgent

steps to accelerate our left flank's advance towards the sea. Unfortunately, all our forces had been committed to action and we were unable to reinforce this important sector. For the first time in my experience as Front Commander I had been left without reserves, and I must say that I did not like it at all.

Meanwhile an alarming situation had begun to develop on the left wing. As our units advanced to the north, our left flank was being exposed since the First Byelorussian Front had so far not budged. More and more frequently the enemy struck at the flanks and rear of our advancing units. We looked with apprehension at Neustettin. The city, to the west of our Front's boundary line, was swarming with enemy forces which might launch an attack against our exposed flank at any moment. I reported this to GHQ. A little later I was called to the telephone by the Supreme Commander. I reported the situation on our Front in general, and on the left wing in particular.

"You mean Zhukov is up to something?" Stalin said.

I said that I did not think he was up to anything, but the fact remained that his troops were not advancing, thereby creating a danger to my exposed flank. I had no forces with which to protect it as my reserves were used up. Therefore I requested that either the Front should be reinforced or the First Byelorussian Front instructed to assume the offensive as quickly as possible. I also outlined the situation in the Neustettin area.

"Could you take Neustettin with your own forces?" Stalin asked. "If you do, we'll fire a salute in your honour."

I replied that we could try, but this would not markedly improve the situation. Stalin said he would hasten the First Byelorussian Front's offensive and rang off. Judging by his voice, he was pleased with the way events were developing.

I got in touch at once with General Oslikovsky and ordered him to capture Neustettin, while continuing to protect the left flank and rear of the Front's strike group.

The new 19th Army Commander firmly and skilfully reorganised his troop control system establishing liaison and communication with all formations and regrouping his forces. He was greatly helped in this by officers N. I. Truzhennikov, M. I. Povaly and other officers of the Front Staff headed by my deputy, General K. P. Trubnikov. The offensive proceeded more successfully, though the enemy continued to

resist stubbornly, clinging to every village. General Romanovsky proved to be an expert in troop manoeuvring. Whenever he could not advance by head-on attack he executed turning movements to the flanks or rear, making wide use of artillery advancing with infantry formations. The gunners and infantry speedily developed a system of close co-operation: artillery helped the infantry to blast its way forward, storm resistance areas and repel panzer attacks; where the guns could not be towed by tractors the infantry wheeled them. The SU-76 self-propelled guns quickly became a forces' favourite. These light, agile machines were always on the spot to help the infantry with their fire or by crushing enemy positions with their tracks; reciprocally, the infantry were always ready to protect them from the enemy.

Good news came from Oslikovsky, whose 3rd Guards Cavalry Corps completely justified our hopes. In co-operation with attached artillery and support aircraft, Oslikovsky carried out a pincer movement on the flanks and rear of the Neustettin garrison. The nazis were routed in a pitched battle and the gallant men carried the city by storm. Leaving one division to protect the flank, Oslikovsky turned his main forces north, operating on the left flank of the 19th Army. We were also delighted to have Oslikovsky's report that west of Neustettin his reconnaissance patrols had contacted a reconnaissance patrol of the 2nd Guards Cavalry Corps of the First Byelorussian Front which, it turned out, Zhukov had ordered on February 26 to advance northwards with the object of protecting our flank. This was evidently an echo of my conversation with the Supreme Commander. To be sure, the 2nd Corps was rather far behind our left flank, but still, it would be able to give us some help in a crisis. Meanwhile we had to do our best with our own resources, sometimes even slowing down the tank corps' advance when a risk arose of its being cut off from the main forces. This was an almost constant threat, as formations of the 3rd Panzer Army stood poised in combat readiness to the west. They were facing the First Byelorussian Front and had not as yet joined in the fighting.

Meanwhile, Panfilov's tank corps was already 40 kilometres ahead of our infantry. I ordered him to consolidate on the Bublitz, Zehendorf line and await the approach of our main forces. Simultaneously, I instructed Romanovsky to speed up the advance of his units.

The salute promised by Stalin for the capture of Neustettin was duly fired, and the Supreme Commander's Order of the Day commended General Oslikovsky's cavalry, General Panfilov's tankmen, General Vershinin's airmen as well as the gunners, engineers and signallers who had participated in the fighting for this town, important supply centre and enemy strong point.

On my orders Panfilov's tank corps halted in the neighbourhood of Bublitz and organised the defence, sending strong groups forward and to the flanks with instructions to hold the captured sectors and reconnoitre the enemy. The nazis tried to strike at the corps' flank and rear from Rummelsburg, but advance units of the 19th Army came up just then and a pitched head-on battle ensued, in which our tanks took part. The enemy was thrown back.

Concentrating its efforts on its left flank, the 70th Army overcame enemy resistance and by evening of February 28 had advanced 12 kilometres to the northwest, with the Firsovich's 8th Mechanised Corps at its head. The corps had been depleted in continuous fighting but, given bold and resolute action, could have achieved important gains. However, it dallied and the infantry began to step on its heels. The Front Military Council was compelled to issue a special order requiring the corps' command to show greater persistence in carrying out its assignment.

Oslikovsky's cavalry advancing to the northwest repeatedly engaged enemy units attempting to strike at the flank of the Front's strike group. Vershinin's airmen gave the corps great help, warning the cavalry of the enemy's approach and bombing enemy positions with great precision.

After stubborn fighting the 49th Army recaptured Ossowo.

To prevent the enemy from transferring forces to our main line of advance, we kept up the offensive all through the night. The men were worn out, the night fighting was a great strain, but there was no other way. It was in the night that our scouts had detected suspicious movements in the neighbourhood of Rummelsburg: the enemy, it turned out, had again gathered a large force here. Under cover of darkness several dozen tanks and thousands of infantry took the field with the apparent object of striking at the 19th Army's exposed flank.

However, the enemy failed to achieve surprise, and Romanovsky assigned the 40th Infantry Corps to intercept him. The infantry. supported from the air, dealt a stunning blow,

and the enemy rolled back to the northeast, suffering heavy losses.

The enemy, it should be said, had carefully planned the attack, which provided for strikes against our main forces on both flanks simultaneously. We had hardly repelled the nazis attacking from the east when fighting began in the west. Substantial enemy forces—the 15th and 32nd Infantry Divisions, two special regiments, six separate battalions and more than 40 panzers and self-propelled guns—were approaching from the area northwest of Bublitz. This blow did not catch us unawares either, and the road of the enemy's forces was blocked by the 272nd Infantry Division, deployed here by Army Commander, Romanovsky, and N. S. Oslikovsky's ubiquitous cavalrymen supported by attack aircraft of the 4th Air Army.

The advancing enemy group was numerically superior to Romanovsky's and Oslikovsky's forces. However, the commanders organised the operation well, and the soldiers fought heroically. The courage and skill of the antitank artillery units played a decisive part in the engagement. Deploying in full view of the enemy, they fired point blank at his tanks and mowed down the infantry with case shot. The battle was a fierce one. We won it thanks to the close co-operation of all arms, the staunchness of the men and their readiness to give their lives, if need be, to help their comrades. The enemy was routed and thrown back.

While this fighting continued on the flanks of our strike group, A. P. Panfilov's tankmen were hammering their way to the sea. On March 3, they approached the enemy's last major stronghold in the corps' zone of operation, the town of Köslin (Koszalin), an important communications centre on the roads to Danzig and Stettin, with a powerful garrison covering the approaches to the Baltic Sea.

I listened to Panfilov's report and then asked what he intended to do next.

"Take the town."

"Have you enough forces?"

"Yes. I've got some infantry with me as well."

His answer pleased me, for it indicated that there was real friendship between the tank crews and the men of the infantry division attached to the corps.

"All right," I said. "Go ahead, but prepare the assault thoroughly."

Panfilov organised the attack excellently. The day was won by a clever manoeuvre of armour and infantry, coupled with destructive artillery fire (Panfilov had several attached artillery units) and the excellent performance of the airmen. In the morning of March 5, our forces took the town, and the remnants of the German garrison surrendered. Many prisoners were taken, including Lieutenant-General von Zülow, head of the Köslin garrison, and his staff. They confirmed our information concerning the forces defending the town: the enemy had had the 1st SS Infantry Division, the 15th and 32nd Infantry Divisions, a tank division and a division of police.

Courage, valour and initiative helped our officers and men to overrun this citadel. Units of the 3rd Guards Tank Corps reached the Baltic Sea, slicing the enemy's East Pomeranian group in half.

A messenger arrived at the Front HQ with three bottles of a clear liquid, a gift from Panfilov's tankmen to the Front Military Council. Curious, we tasted it. It was water, brackish water smelling of seaweed. Water from the Baltic Sea! We heartily thanked the men for their fine symbolic gift.

When our strike group reached the coast, it turned east towards the armies on the right wing. On the west the advancing troops' rear was protected by the 19th Army's 134th Infantry Corps. Now the vise was closing tighter and tighter around the enemy.

According to reconnaissance data, we still had opposite us forces of the Army Group Vistula: the 7th and 46th Panzer, the 18th Alpine Division, and the 20th, 23rd, 27th and 55th Army Corps. Their strength had, of course, diminished in the fighting, but the enemy was still strong.

The nazi command was merciless towards its soldiers, forcing them to fight even when the hopelessness of resistance was obvious. The Graudenz garrison, cut off from friendly troops, fought to the end, and only on March 6, after days of street fighting, was the town finally taken over by units of Colonel G. L. Sonnikov's 142nd Infantry Division and Major-General Sabir Umar-ogly Rakhimov's 37th Guards Infantry Division (loaned for the operation to the 2nd Strike Army from Batov's army).

We were eager to finish off the surrounded enemy as quickly as possible, but were sadly short of mobile formations. I decided to ask GHQ temporarily to hand over to us

one of the First Byelorussian Front's two tank armies. My reasoning was convincing enough: the faster we finished off the nazis in Eastern Pomerania, the sooner would our troops be available for the impending Berlin operation. Stalin agreed and said that instructions would at once be issued giving us temporary use of the 1st Guards Tank Army, which was the closer of the two to our Front.

By this time the forces of the First Byelorussian Front, which had assumed the offensive on March 1, had broken through the enemy defences and were successfully advancing northward in two directions: on Kolberg and on Kammin. Zhukov was delivering his main attack in the centre. Adjoining us on our flank were the Polish 1st Army and 2nd Guards Cavalry Corps, delivering the secondary attack. They were advancing rather slowly, which compelled us to keep a wary eye on our left flank. But finally our neighbours reached the sea, where our infantry and cavalry helped the Polish units rout the enemy surrounded in the area east and southeast of Kolberg.

In accordance with GHQ orders, on March 8 we received the 1st Guards Tank Army, commanded by General M. Y. Katukov. When the operation was over it was to be returned to the First Byelorussian Front. Zhukov rang me up about this.

"I warn you," he said, "that the Army must be returned in the same state as you received it."

I promised to do so, saying that I hoped it would be in good fighting condition.

Realising that the enemy would make use of the slightest delay in our advance to organise resistance, we did all we could to keep up the pace of the offensive. To this end we dispensed with all regrouping manoeuvres, which would have inevitably slowed down our advance, if only briefly.

As our units pushed forward, the frontage shrank and we could have pulled out some forces to the second echelon. But it seemed a pity to waste time, so we merely contracted the battle formations of the forward echelon. Besides, the divisions were weakened and without such contraction we would have been unable to maintain our impetus. The line and political officers kept the men's morale as high as ever. Credit for this must be given to the Front's Political Department. Its chief, General A. D. Okorokov, a fine political officer, sent out all his personnel to the troops. The Party and Komsomol organisations saw to it that every man knew

his combat task and was able to carry it out unstintingly. The Front, Army and divisional newspapers, and the propagandists in their talks, urged the men on and called for the speediest possible defeat of the enemy.

Still our progress was slower than we would have liked. On March 6, the 19th Army, for example, advanced only 12 kilometres to the east. Ahead lay Stolp, the second largest city of Eastern Pomerania after Stettin, the approaches to which were strongly fortified. I called up General Panfilov.

"We've got to help the infantry," I said to him.

He understood me at once. "You want me to take Stolp?"

"Yes."

"How long will you give me?"

"Twenty-four hours."

"It'll be done."

To tell the truth, I thought Panfilov was rather overconfident. Stolp was a large industrial centre with aircraft and other war factories. There could be no doubt that the enemy would hold on for all he was worth.

But Panfilov and his Guardsmen deserved their reputation for valour and resourcefulness. His tanks passed through the battle formations of the slowly advancing infantry, secretly skirted the city along forest roads, and suddenly attacked it from the flanks and rear. The appearance of our tanks in the streets stunned the nazis and they were unable to organise an effective defence. The German garrison surrendered. Panfilov handed the captured city together with all the booty and prisoners over to the infantry, and led his corps eastward, scattering and destroying columns of enemy troops, who knew nothing of the state of affairs and had been converging on Stolp from the north and southeast. Strong advance detachments of tanks with tank-borne infantry raced ahead, in an enveloping movement captured the bridges over the River Lupow-Vlies intact and, repelling enemy counterblows, held them until the approach of the corps' main forces. Crossing the river, the tankmen threw back the enemy attempting to organise the defence on this advantageous line.

The 19th Army infantry followed swiftly in the tanks' wake. General Romanovsky used all means at his disposal, from his own motor transport and captured enemy trucks to horse-drawn carts, to accelerate the advance. On wheels,

the infantry could keep up with the tanks, while at the same time mopping up resisting pockets left behind by the tanks.

The rapid advance of the Front's left wing compelled the enemy hastily to pull back his troops. Under cover furnished by powerful rear guards, he sought to disengage from our units so as to withdraw his main forces and occupy the well-prepared Gdynia-Danzig defence area. The nazi command counted on delaying us and pinning down substantial forces for some time on this line. We could not allow this to happen, and took appropriate steps to prevent the enemy from carrying out an organised retreat.

The Army and large unit commanders had worked out their missions at the start of the operation and showed imagination in carrying them out. The Front HQ followed events closely so as to be able to make prompt adjustments in the course of the offensive. The airmen were of great help to us, keeping round-the-clock watch over the enemy and his movements and informing the Front HQ and lower echelons of their observations. Planes of the 4th Air Army raided the enemy in close co-operation with ground forces. We all greatly admired the courage and skill of the girl fliers of the night bomber regiment commanded by Yevdokia Bershanskaya. In their small, slow Po-2 airplanes they hovered over the enemy in the darkness, bombing columns and troop concentrations.

The 8th Tank and mechanised corps played a great part in the pursuit of the enemy. Although they had been weakened considerably in the earlier heavy fighting, they were resolute in action and manoeuvred boldly. With their help infantry units threw back the rear guards and prevented the main enemy forces from disengaging from our advancing units. All armour formations, in addition to liaison with the armies in whose sectors they operated, were instructed to maintain liaison and communication among themselves, informing each other of the situation on their sectors.

The enemy had hastily fallen back in the centre, but on the right flank he continued to resist stubbornly, and Fedyuninsky's and Batov's troops had to fight for every kilometre of ground.

During March 8 and 9 the Front's forces advanced 20 to 60 kilometres, liberating more than 700 towns and villages.

The 1st Guards Tank Army arrived and was given the task of overtaking the 19th Army, capturing crossings on

the River Leba and the Brenkenhof Canal, routing the opposing enemy units and reaching the coast of the Gulf of Danzig not later than March 12.

The 2nd Strike Army was advancing on Danzig from the south. The enemy fought back desperately, launching counterattacks supported by dozens of panzers. Each step of Fedyuninsky's army was won with great difficulty. The 65th Army advanced faster. On reaching the line Lappin, Zuckau, Batov had turned his troops and now he was approaching Danzig from the west. It was backed up by its neighbours—the 49th and 70th Armies—advancing north in the direction of Zoppot (Sopot).

The enemy's attempts to delay our units on the left flank and in the centre on the line Zuckau, Karthause, Vitzkof, Schurow, Schmolsin failed, and it was stormed by a tank strike followed up by infantry. Our tanks headed for the Gulf of Danzig hot on the enemy's heels. Units of Panfilov's 3rd Guards Tank Corps again distinguished themselves in these engagements. They had been the first to force the River Leba in the neighbourhood of Lauenburg and now, without slowing down, they had overtaken several large enemy columns, routing them and capturing much equipment and many prisoners. The 1st Guards Tank Army had also crossed the Leba and then the Brenkenhof Canal and was approaching Danzig.

The retreating enemy managed to take up positions in the Gdynia-Danzig fortified area. This was facilitated by the terrain and the spring flooding. In retreating the nazis demolished and mined roads and opened dams, flooding whole areas. We were also terribly handicapped by refugees The Goebbels' propaganda machine had hammered such slanders about the Soviet troops in the Germans' heads that at the first rumour of our advance people fled their homes in terror with their chattles, alone and in families. The autobahns and byroads teemed with people, trudging to the west and to the east. The roads were, furthermore, littered with abandoned enemy equipment, and our troops had to make their way through the chaos.

Soon, though, the refugees discovered that no one molested them, that the Goebbels' propaganda was nothing but lies and, reassured, turned back to their homes, again crowding along the roads, this time in the opposite direction.

The advanced armour formations overcame the forward defences, but were unable to approach Danzig and Gdynia,

which were in a powerful fortified area defended by a total of almost 20 divisions.

Danzig was a strong fortress. Powerful, well-camouflaged forts held the whole terrain under artillery fire. An ancient rampart surrounded the city. In front of it was an outer line of modern fortifications, with ferro-concrete and cemented stone pillboxes on all dominating heights. The system of permanent emplacements was supplemented by field positions, while the terrain adjoining the city on the south and southeast could be flooded.

The fortifications on the approaches to Gdynia, also a first-rate fortress, were just as powerful.

The ground defences were supported by fire from the sea: anchored in the Gulf of Danzig were six cruisers, 13 destroyers and dozens of smaller ships.

And even after we overcame all the fortified positions we would still have to storm the cities, in which every building had been turned into a weapon emplacement.

To deny the enemy time to organise the defence, I decided to dispense with involved regrouping manoeuvres and proceed with the assault of the fortifications as soon as the armies reached them. A favourable factor was that the frontage of our advance continued to contract: from 240 kilometres at the beginning of the East Pomeranian campaign it had shrunk to 60. The frontage of each of the armies operating on the main line of advance was no more than 10-12 kilometres, which gave much more punch to their blows.

The main strike was at first directed against the centre of the enemy's defences in the direction of Zoppot with the purpose of driving a wedge between the fortresses.

The Front Artillery Chief detailed a special long-range artillery group to engage the enemy warships, but it was soon deprived of its targets. Vershinin's airmen handled the problem to our satisfaction. His bombers and attack aircraft dealt with the warships so effectively that they were forced to weigh anchor and beat a hasty retreat.

The armies continued their closely co-ordinated advance within their various sectors. The tank formations assigned vehicles for close infantry support. The airmen kept the enemy's airfield, on which up to 100 aircraft were based, under control and helped the infantry units penetrate the enemy defences. The engineer units under General Blagoslavov advanced together with the infantry, putting enemy

weapon emplacements out of action, demolishing fortifications and camouflaging infantry and tank movements with smoke screens. Blagoslavov even constructed catapults to fling heavy shells captured in large quantities at German ammunition dumps into the enemy positions.

The assault began on March 14. On the first day our aircraft destroyed all the enemy planes on the Danzig airfield, thereby ensuring our complete domination in the air. We kept up a steady pressure on all sectors, but centered our main efforts in the Zoppot-Oliva direction. Fierce fighting ensued, the enemy clinging desperately to every trench.

Our hopes for a swift penetration of the enemy defences failed to materialise. Of course, we gained something from the suddenness of our attack, denying the enemy time to organise his defences adequately, but penetration of the strongly fortified area was a difficult task.

The roar of artillery continued unabated day and night. In the course of the fighting officers and men devised ways and means of overcoming various obstacles. Improvised assault groups comprising infantry, artillery, armour and engineers were organised. Aircraft droned continuously overhead, attacking *en masse* and in small groups to support the assault. Step by step we gnawed into the enemy defence.

The Soviet soldier is brave and self-sacrificing in action. Wounded men mustered all their strength to crawl on with grenades and attack an enemy pillbox. But we reminded our commanders and political officers again and again that they should save life and seek victory not by blood but by skill.

The men displayed prowess, stamina and resourcefulness. As always, the Communists and Komsomols were in the van. They quickly put every useful initiative to use and themselves displayed inexhaustible resourcefulness and ingenuity. As soon as an assault group scored a success its experience was passed on to all the troops.

The enemy's desperate counterattacks were of no avail. In fact, they undermined his strength. After losing dozens of men, he would fall back and be pursued into his positions.

Meanwhile the 1st Guards Tank Army overthrew the enemy covering detachments and reached the Putziger-Wiek bay. M. Y. Katukov led his tanks along the coast to strike at Gdynia from the north, units of the 19th Army advancing together with the tankmen. On the Front's right flank the

2nd Strike Army slowly but surely forced the enemy back. Its strike force was already eight kilometres from the southern suburb of Danzig.

The Third Byelorussian Front on our right reached the east bank of the Vistula, where units of its 48th Army established contact with the right flank of our 2nd Strike Army, wedging the enemy into a small triangle of territory, to which he clung desperately, as it kept open his supply lines to the Samland peninsula along the Frische-Nehrung spit. One day Marshal A. M. Vasilevsky, who had assumed command of the Third Byelorussian Front after the death in action of General Chernyakhovsky, called me up.

"Why are you pushing enemy troops into our sector?" he asked.

"You should be glad," I countered. "You'll get more prisoners."

Actually, we were not very worried about this patch of shoreline because the Danzig-Gdynia operation was now entering its final stage.

Having broken through three lines of enemy fortifications, in the morning of March 25 units of the 70th Army, with the 3rd Guards Tank Corps and some units of the 49th Army, broke into Zoppot, cleared the city in fierce street fighting and headed for the Danzig suburb of Oliva.

Our troops reached the Gulf of Danzig, cutting the enemy group in three, with one pocket at Danzig, the other at Gdynia, and the third at the Putziger-Nehrung (Hel) spit.

Mopping-up of the Gdynia group was assigned to the 19th Army and 3rd Guards Tank Corps. By that time the 1st Guards Tank Army was being withdrawn to the concentration area to be returned to the First Byelorussian Front. Overcoming enemy fortifications, the infantry and tanks approached the city and plunged into street fighting. On March 26, we carried Gdynia, and the remnants of the enemy retreated to the coast north of the city, abandoning wounded and equipment.

In the fighting for Gdynia four enemy divisions, eight separate regiments and 20 miscellaneous battalions were routed. The remnants of this group that had managed to escape to the north (a tank division, units of a mechanised and infantry divisions, an artillery brigade and six marine battalions) were routed several days later. In the fighting at Gdynia the enemy lost 50,000 killed, 229 panzers and self-propelled guns, 387 field guns and more than 3,500

automobiles. Our troops captured more than 18,000 prisoners, some 200 panzers and self-propelled guns, 600 guns, 71 aircraft and 6,246 automobiles.

On March 26, after heavy fighting, units of the 2nd Strike and 65th Armies penetrated the whole depth of the enemy defence and besieged Danzig. To prevent useless loss of life we sent an ultimatum of surrender to the garrison, as further resistance was futile. If the ultimatum were rejected the civilian population was advised to leave the city.

The nazi command did not reply to our offer. The order was given for the assault to begin.

A separate tank brigade of the Polish Army took part in the liberation of the ancient Polish city of Gdansk alongside the Soviet troops and fought bravely against the common enemy.

The assault began simultaneously from three sides. The fighting was fierce, the nazis resisting especially stubbornly in large buildings and factory shops, and we had to knock them out of every building.

Enemy warships had reappeared in the gulf during the assault, and their heavy guns gave our units plenty of trouble. Quite a few pieces of long-range artillery, mostly 122-mm and 152-mm guns, had to be withdrawn from the assault and deployed along the shore. Although our artillerymen had never engaged naval targets before, they were fairly accurate and their fire forced the nazi ships to keep their distance, thus lessening the effectiveness of their fire. Then Vershinin's aircraft went into action. Attack aircraft swooped on the ships from all sides, while bombers dropped their lethal loads from above. The airmen successfully coped with their task and again forced the enemy ships to quit the Gulf of Danzig, this time for good.

On March 30, Danzig was completely liberated, the remnants of enemy troops fleeing to the marshy mouth of the Vistula, where they were soon all rounded up. Soldiers of the Polish Army hoisted their national flag over the what was once again to become the Polish city of Gdansk.

In the fighting for Gdansk we took more than 10,000 prisoners, 140 tanks and self-propelled guns, 358 field guns and large quantities of other materiel.

Summing up the East Pomeranian campaign, it can be claimed in all fairness that it was of tremendous strategic importance.

Speed and continuity, which denied the enemy a moment's respite to build up reserves or regroup his forces, were what primarily contributed to the success of this interesting, complex offensive campaign; the operation, which was carried out at a cracking pace, made the forces of the Second Byelorussian Front available in good time for the Berlin Operation. The Soviet troops' gallant performance resulted in the liberation of ancient Polish lands forcibly annexed at various times by the German aggressors. All of Polish Pomerania, with its large towns and Baltic Sea ports, reverted to the Polish people.

THE ODER-ELBE

As we had expected, after the elimination of the enemy's East Pomeranian group we were to take part in the Berlin Operation. According to the GHQ directive, our Front was forthwith to redeploy westward in the Stettin-Rostock direction, and replace units of the First Byelorussian Front on a line from Kolberg, across the mouth of the Oder and along the Oder's east bank to Schwedt. The main group, comprising three armies, was to be deployed in the zone Altdamm-Schwedt.

Our primary task was to transfer the troops with all haste to our line of departure. It was necessary to plan the manoeuvre thoroughly and carry it out without a hitch.

Only yesterday the troops had been advancing eastward; now they had to turn west and cover 300-350 kilometres in marching formation over country ravaged by the recent fierce fighting; smoke from burning buildings had not yet dispersed, and work to clear roads and restore crossings over numerous rivers, streams and canals had only just begun. There was not enough rolling stock on the railways and the track and bridges were in such a state that trains crawled along at walking speed. In these conditions we had to redeploy hundreds of thousands of troops, thousands of guns, tens of thousands of tons of ammunition and huge quantities of other supplies.

As usual, many people took part in drawing up the regrouping plans: leading officers of the Front Staff, Political Department and Logistical Services, arms and services chiefs, and army commanders. Even before the plan was finally endorsed many preliminary instructions involving great numbers of people had to be issued. Before the troops were ready to move, special detachments set off along their routes for reconnaissance and road restoration, removing obstacles and building detours. Traffic services were organised at bridges and river crossings and traffic check-points were set up at road intersections.

In view of the extremely poor handling capacity of the railways we decided to use them only to transport tanks and other tracked vehicles. The bulk of the troops proceeded in marching formation, using all available wheel transport from trucks to horse-carts. Infantry moved forward in waves, now on foot, now on wheels. Our main concern was strict adherence to schedule and discipline on the march.

Commanders, political workers, Party and Komsomol organisations impressed on the men the importance of arriving at the designated positions on time. Ahead lay the final, decisive fighting; this was not a question of simply carrying out a march: the men had to be prepared for new engagements. The veterans of past fighting shared their experiences with the raw recruits. Special attention was given to problems of forcing water barriers and wooded and marshy terrain. In spite of the weeks of heavy fighting behind them, the men were in high spirits and showed no signs of fatigue.

The first to prepare for the march were the 49th and 70th Armies, which started out on April 4 and 5. They were followed on the 6th by the 65th, which had just mopped up the enemy units in the neighbourhood of Krokau. The 2nd Strike Army would be able to take the field not earlier than April 8, after it was replaced by the 5th Tank Army.

The 19th Army still had to mop up the enemy on the Putziger-Nehrung spit north of Gdansk, and it would remain there to defend the Baltic coast up to the mouth of the River Oder in co-operation with the attached 93rd and 153rd Fortified Regions.

The Front and Army headquarters, the arms, services and logistical staffs were kept busy day and night. They had to ensure order, adherence to the movement timetables and precise fulfilment of the deployment plan. The members of the Military Council and workers of the political organisations spent all their time with the troops on the march. Political work continued ceaselessly, every halt being used for talks with the men.

The plan provided for a daily march of 40-45 kilometres for a combined services column. All available transport was mobilised. Lorries carried men, regimental and battalion artillery, mortars, ammunition, food and kitchens. The motor columns were echeloned. Traffic control posts were set up every 30-40 kilometres. Motor columns travelled at

30-40 kilometres per hour in daytime and 20-30 at night. Horse transport covered 35-45 kilometres a day, and troops moving on foot, 30-35 kilometres.

At the beginning of April, I was called to GHQ for the final briefing on the Second Byelorussian Front's task.

In drawing up the Berlin Operation the Soviet Command took account of the political and strategic situation that had developed by that time. Although the war was obviously lost, the nazi leadership continued to hope against hope. The Germans had all but ceased resisting the Allies, and were concentrating the greater part of their forces against the Soviet Army. Hitler and his henchmen still gambled on some chance of survival. These hopes had to be foiled, and so our mission was to rout the enemy's Berlin group, take the German capital and gain the River Elbe.

The implementation of this task was assigned to the three fronts: First Byelorussian, First Ukrainian and Second Byelorussian. According to the overall plan of the operation the First Byelorussian Front was to strike in the general direction of Berlin and at the same time envelop the city from the north with part of its troops; the First Ukrainian Front was to strike a cleaving blow south of Berlin, enveloping the city from the south. Our Second Byelorussian Front was to deal a cleaving blow north of Berlin, protecting the First Byelorussian Front's right flank against possible counterattacks from the north and wiping out enemy forces north of Berlin by pushing them into the sea.

D-day was set for April 16 for the First Byelorussian and First Ukrainian Fronts, and the 20th for us. (We could not have started earlier in view of our redeployment from east to west.)

I must say that we obtained even this four days' delay only after I had explained all the difficulties we faced. The Front was in effect being mounted on a new sector even before it had completed the East Pomeranian operation. We were given an incredibly short time to regroup, although our troops had to cover more than 300 kilometres. I requested help to carry out this difficult redeployment manoeuvre, but we received no additional motor transport. All this left little time to prepare for the serious operation of forcing such a major water barrier as the lower reaches of the Oder. Furthermore, the Front's forces would have to be thrown into the assault straight from the march. As we shall see, this greatly complicated the operation.

By the time I returned from Moscow the troops were already on the march. Without waiting for their arrival, I carried out a detailed on-the-spot inspection of the terrain together with the army commanders and their chiefs of staffs and organised reconnaissance of the enemy positions.

Unfortunately, the units of the First Byelorussian Front we were to replace could give us no useful information about the enemy. They simply had had no time to gather it. In a conversation with me, General P. A. Belov, Commander of the 61st Army, who was handing over his sector to three of our armies, was unable to tell me anything about the enemy that I did not already know.

This compelled me to depart from the established procedure and assign the army commanders their tasks before we had sufficient data: there was nothing else to do, as our deadline was rapidly approaching and we had to give the army commanders time to work out their tasks with the commanders of the lower formations.

We carried out the on-the-spot inspection on April 10, starting with the 65th Army zone. I was accompanied by generals and officers of the Front HQ and Command and the commanders of the 4th Air and 49th Armies. We were met by P. I. Batov with a group of his officers. The site had been excellently chosen, and the terrain was observable for several kilometres before us.

The sight did not please us however, at least from the tactical point of view. Between us and the enemy positions was the river, which forked here into two wide channels, the East and West Oder. The land between them was flooded at this time of the year, thus presenting us with a continuous water barrier five kilometres wide. The high western bank was hardly visible. It would have been simpler if it were all river, as we could then have crossed it in boats and pontoons. The floodland, however, was too shallow for this.

"Our men," Batov said thoughtfully, "call it 'two Dniepers with a Pripyat in between'. Quite aptly I think."

This was certainly a difficult obstacle, all the more so as the opposite bank had the advantage of ours in height.

We decided to force crossings on a wide frontage in the zones of all three armies simultaneously. Any success on one sector would be immediately exploited by rushing forces and materiel from other sectors. Accordingly, it was

essential to provide for extensive manoeuvring along the front. Fortunately the possibilities for this existed.

The water-covered, marshy floodland was practically impassable, but in some places half-demolished dikes rose above the water, notably in the sectors of the 65th (remnants of a causeway) and 49th Armies. We decided to make use of them.

This on-the-spot reconnaissance carried out jointly with the army commanders in the whole zone of the three armies' forthcoming offensive was most helpful. Necessary adjustments were made to the original plans and missions were specified. The army commanders plunged into preparations for the operation.

The troops began to arrive. On April 13, the forward units of Batov's 65th Army arrived and occupied positions on the line Altdamm, Ferdinandstein; to the south, V. S. Popov's 70th Army came up on the 16th; and still farther south, I. T. Grishin's 49th Army had taken over the Kranzfelde, Niiperwise sector on the previous day. All the three armies were replacing the First Byelorussian Front's 61st.

By the morning of April 15, units of I. I. Fedyuninsky's 2nd Strike Army had occupied the line Kammin, Inamünde north of the 65th Army, replacing the Polish 1st Army. On the same day, units of V. Z. Romanovsky's 19th Army deployed on the Baltic coast, replacing our 3rd Guards Cavalry Corps, which was to make a long march to Schwedt.

By April 17, our mobile formations—the 1st, 3rd and 8th Guards Tank and 8th Mechanised Corps had completed their redeployment, K. A. Vershinin's 4th Air Army was also regrouped by the beginning of the operation.

We were all in the highest spirits. The troops set about preparing for the offensive as soon as they reached their positions. It was hard to believe that the men had just completed long, tiring marches with only brief halts for snatches of sleep on damp ground beneath the open sky. Nothing could quench their exultant mood. Everyone realised the importance of the task and did his best to carry it out.

The preliminary work with Front and Army command personnel had been completed before the troops' arrival to the line of departure, and now preparations were launched on the divisional and regimental level. I must say that in all the units I visited I found that the tasks had been worked out ably and purposefully. In the course of the war our

commanders and political officers had acquired profound knowledge and a wealth of practical experience. This could be seen in the preparation for the offensive. Many valuable suggestions were made and immediately put into effect. The men, who had seen action on woody and marshy terrain and forced many rivers, applied all their experience to solve the tasks in hand.

Vershinin's airmen took aerial photographs of the whole enemy defence system. Our air and ground reconnaissance worked tirelessly. We established that the main enemy defence line along the western bank of the West Oder was up to 10 kilometres in depth and comprised two or three positions, each with one or two continuous lines of trenches. Every ten or fifteen metres along the river bank there were foxholes and machine-gun emplacements connected with the main trenches by communication trenches.

Prisoners reported that all villages to a depth of 40 kilometres from the Oder had been adapted for defence and turned into strongholds. We could well believe this, as we had seen something like it in Eastern Pomerania.

We also discovered that on our sector the enemy had set up a second line of defence along the western bank of the River Randow, 20 km from the Oder. And further on our air reconnaissance spotted a third defence line. Indications were that the enemy was preparing to offer stiff resistance.

According to Front Intelligence data we faced large enemy forces. The isthmus from the sea coast at Wald-Diewenow to Sager (30 kilometres of frontage) was held by the corps group Swinemünde under the command of General Frölich, with two marine battalions, an aviation school, a marine regiment and five fortress regiments in the forward echelon and units of an infantry training division in the reserve.

Southwards, a 90-kilometre sector of the front up to the western bank of the West Oder was held by the 3rd Panzer Army commanded by Colonel-General Manteuffel, the 32nd Army Corps and the Army Corps Oder. In the forward echelon they had three infantry divisions, two fortress regiments, two separate infantry regiments, a battalion and a combat group. In the second echelon there were three infantry and two motorised divisions, two infantry and two artillery brigades, three separate regiments, four battalions, two battle groups and an officers' school. In addition, the 3rd Panzer

Army had been reinforced with three artillery regiments, the 406th Volks Artillery Corps and the 15th Anti-Aircraft Division.

Thus, the enemy was strongest on the very sector where we planned to deliver the main attack. Circumstances, however, made it impossible to introduce any changes in the offensive plans. In pursuance of the GHQ directive, we planned to deliver the main strike on a 45-kilometre frontage between Stettin and Schwedt involving three armies (the 65th, 70th and 49th), three tank corps, a mechanised and a cavalry corps on the Front's left wing. On penetrating the enemy defence on the west bank of the West Oder, we were to pursue the offensive in the general direction of Neustrelitz, and between the 12th and 15th day of the operation reach the line Neuenkirchen, Demmin, Malhen, Warren, Wittenberge (on the Elbe). Our boundary with the First Byelorussian Front passed through Arnswalde, Schwedt, Angermünde, Gransee, Wittenberge.

After penetrating the enemy defence, each field army was to be reinforced with a tank corps (a mechanised corps in the case of the 49th). The 3rd Guards Cavalry Corps was to remain in the Front reserve and deployed behind the 49th Army's left flank.

The artillery was to operate according to the plans of the army commanders. On the direction of the main strike artillery density was to be no less than 150 tubes per kilometre of frontage (not counting 45- and 57-mm guns). The task of the artillery was to assist the infantry in forcing the Oder and penetrating the whole tactical depth of the enemy defence. Subsequently, it was to escort the infantry and echelons exploiting the success.

As for the tank corps, in the first stage of the operation the Front Command was to decide when to throw them into the breach. Subsequently they would be subordinate to the commanders of the armies to which they were attached.

On the eve of the offensive the 4th Air Army was to strike at gun emplacements, headquarters, communication centres and artillery positions on the west bank of the West Oder.

In the course of the offensive each field army of the left wing would receive one division of attack aircraft under operational control.

In the first stage of the operation the air force had an important task to carry out The Oder, with its flooded

central island and its marshlands on the eastern bank, was up to six kilometres wide. This meant that during the artillery preparation and infantry assault across the river artillery fire would have to be delivered at a fairly long range, which would naturally reduce its effectiveness. Nor would we be able to transfer the guns quickly to the western bank as this would require the establishment of crossings. Hence, initially the infantry would have to fight without artillery escort, and the task of providing fire support would therefore rest with the air force. I must say that they coped with their tasks brilliantly, providing excellent cover with striking and bombing attacks during the assault. This was facilitated by a tremendous amount of preparatory work on synchronising air and ground operations. In short, we placed great hopes in our air force, and the 4th Air Army justified them completely.

Much attention was given to engineer support. General Blagoslavov's engineers did a prodigious amount of work. Within the shortest possible time they brought up and camouflaged dozens of pontoons, hundreds of boats, and stocks of timber for building landing stages and bridges; they built many rafts and laid plank roads across marshy sections of the bank.

On April 16, the rumble of cannonade reached us from the south: the First Byelorussian Front had launched the offensive. Soon we would be joining in.

On the initiative of the army commanders, several units were transferred across the eastern stream of the river to the floodland under cover of night and they occupied the dikes there. This was a bold and daring enterprise, in which P. I. Batov was especially successful. Division commander P. A. Teremov with his advanced battalions occupied undamaged sections of the causeway, dislodging the nazis that held them.

Thus were created intermediary bridgeheads in the middle of the flooded island, where our forces gradually built up their strength. Subsequently this greatly facilitated the assault across the river.

Much could be said of the daring night patrols of our scouts on the western bank of the West Oder. They would swim over, often seizing important objectives under the very noses of the nazis and holding them against vastly superior forces.

Finally the time came when we could sum up the work carried out and pronounce the Front's forces ready for the offensive.

The Front Military Council Members, Generals N. Y. Subbotin and A. G. Russkikh, and the Chief of the Front Political Department, General A. D. Okorokov, the Front Headquarters, the arm and service chiefs and logistics chief could say with full justification that everything had been done for the success of the operation.

In the evening of April 19, I reported over the telephone to the Supreme Commander that the Front's troops were ready to commence the offensive at the time appointed by GHQ. I was quite confident of success.

On the eve of the offensive, our bombers pounded the enemy positions all night. The Women's Night Bomber Regiment commanded by Yevdokia Bershanskaya made a record number of sorties. I have already mentioned this gallant unit of young girl fliers. They had been fighting bravely since the days of the defence of the Northern Caucasus. Many of them had been awarded orders, and 23 had received the title of Hero of the Soviet Union, among them M. P. Chechneva, L. N. Litvinova, N. F. Meklin, R. Y. Aronova, M. V. Smirnova, Y. A. Nikulina, A. V. Popova and Y. A. Zhikulenko. The regiment itself was awarded the Order of the Red Banner and the Order of Suvorov, III class. The Front took legitimate pride in our heroines, who gave the enemy plenty of trouble with their daring night raids.

All night special units engaged in fierce fighting to expand their footholds on the western bank of the West Oder and gain complete control of the floodland. Forces were built up on the dikes between the two streams. All along the river from Altdamm to Schwedt intense work went on to prepare the pontoons and set them afloat and lay plank roads across the marshes. Many light transportable boats were readied.

To mislead the enemy we made a show of preparing to force the river north of Stettin. Under cover of smokescreens, units of the 19th and 2nd Strike Armies raised a terrific din. As a matter of fact they *were* preparing to carry out a landing across the Dievenow bay and it would be well worthwhile gaining foothold on the opposite shore.

The Front delivered the main assault with three armies on a 47-km frontage between Altdamm and Schwedt, but each

army had marked out a narrow sector of its frontage—not more than 4 km—for the breakthrough.

The artillery preparation was to start at 0700 hours and last 60 minutes.

That night P. I. Batov called up and asked permission to start the offensive an hour earlier as a wind had sprung up which was driving water into the flood valley, the water level was rising and this could jeopardise the crossing. Furthermore, the enemy was building up pressure against the detachments holding bridgeheads on the western bank, and they had to be supported as quickly as possible. Batov went on to say that he had issued the necessary orders and his troops were ready to go into action an hour earlier. There was nothing left for me to do but endorse his initiative.

I got in touch with the other armies. The commanders, V. S. Popov and I. T. Grishin, stuck to the original decision and did not alter the time of the attack. They also assured me that everything had been checked and the troops were ready.

On April 20, all three armies of the Front's main group began to force crossings over the West Oder.

The crossing was effected under cover of smokescreens. Our artillery and mortars fired smoke projectiles, which blinded enemy observation posts and emplacements.

The troops of the 65th Army were the first to start the crossing. All boats and rafts were launched almost simultaneously with the start of the artillery preparation, which Batov had decided should last 45 minutes. They included many light boats which came in handy for crossing rivers with marshy banks and if they ran aground in midstream the men could easily float them again. Batov managed to land a large detachment of infantry with machine-guns, mortars and 45-mm guns on the western bank of the West Oder, reinforcing the small units that had been holding out there since earlier in the night. New assault waves came up, and the pontoons could now be used.

Fierce fighting broke out for the dikes on the western bank, which we needed as landing stages and disembarking aprons for the tanks and guns ferried over on pontoons. The enemy fully realised this and clung to the dikes for dear life. As luck would have it, a dense morning mist, made thicker by smokescreens, restricted air support for our forces wedged into the enemy defence. However, after

0900 hours the weather improved and our aircraft came out in force.

The fighting on the west bank steadily mounted in pitch. As our forces built up, the combat area expanded. The men quickly dug in at every new sector and all enemy attempts to return it were repelled. Newly arriving units widened the bridgehead, literally gnawing into the enemy defences. Stubbornly, persistently they advanced. and all enemy attempts to halt them were in vain, despite wave after wave of counterattacks, the next one fiercer than the other.

The engineers, assisted by infantry units, proceeded to set up pontoon bridges and ferry crossings. They were greatly hampered by the fire of enemy warships anchored in the bay, which continued unitl the weather improved, and Vershinin's aircraft strafed and bombed them, forcing them to put out to sea.

On Batov's sector the offensive developed successfully. The number of our troops on the western bank increased by the hour and the enemy was compelled to send in his reserves. No longer able to recapture the ground gained by our units, he strove at least to halt any further advance on the sector. Already taking part in the counterattacks were units of the 27th SS Infantry Division Langemark and the 28th SS Infantry Division Wallonie, constituting the reserve of the 3rd Panzer Army. Actually, however, the battle was just getting under way. We had only advance troops fighting on the western bank, without tank support and practically without artillery support. It was only the grit shown by these units that forced the enemy to commit his reserves. Our men never looked back. Whether pushing ahead or hanging on to captured objectives with their last strength, they never gave in.

By 1300 hours, two 16-ton ferry crossings were in operation in the 65th Army zone. Towards evening, 31 battalions with fifty 45-mm guns, seventy 82-mm and 120-mm mortars and fifteen SU-76 self-propelled guns were ferried over to the western bank. In the course of a day of fighting Batov's forces occupied a bridgehead more than 6 kilometres wide and up to 1.5 km in depth, where four divisions of K. M. Erastov's and N. Y. Chuvakov's infantry corps were fighting. Troops continued to cross to the bridgehead.

I arrived with Front Artillery Chief, A. K. Sokolsky, 4th Air Army Commander, K. A. Vershinin and Engineers Chief, B. V. Blagoslavov at Batov's observation post, from which

sectors of the other bank could be seen, though to no great depth as it was higher than ours. Still, we saw plenty. Notably we observed an enemy counterattack with about a battalion of infantry and seven panzers in the zone of K. Y: Grebennik's 37th Guards Infantry Division. Soon all seven panzers, hit by direct-laying guns, went up in flames and the infantry beat a hasty retreat.

After reviewing the situation I decided to take advantage of the 65th Army's success and let units of the 2nd Strike Army use one of Batov's crossings to transfer troops to the western bank, with the object of enveloping Stettin from the south and west. The operation could, of course, be carried out only after the 65th Army completed the crossing.

Wishing Batov further success, I promised to reinforce his army with M. F. Panov's Don Guards Tank Corps, with which he had fought jointly in previous engagements. Batov was very pleased.

We went on to V. S. Popov's 70th Army, where initial successes had also been scored. Like Batov, Popov also had a frontage of 14 kilometres. The armies were approximately of the same strength (there was a shortage of manpower, divisions numbering between 3,500 and 5,000 effectives).

However, conditions for the offensive were much better in the 70th Army's zone than in the 65th's, whose flank was exposed to the fortress city of Stettin with its strong garrison, heavy artillery and warships capable of causing a lot of trouble.

Popov also had a well-equipped OP from which the operations could be observed over a fairly great distance.

The Army's units were launched across the river under cover of the artillery preparation, which began here later than on Batov's sector and lasted 60 minutes. The crossing was effected on a wide front with the aid of many boats brought up in advance to the eastern bank of the West Oder. The Army delivered its main attack on a 4-km breakthrough sector with an artillery density of 200-220 guns and mortars per kilometre. Under cover of artillery, all available floating craft headed for the opposite bank, everyone but the men at the oars keeping up a sustained barrage of small-arms fire.

The enemy offered stiff resistance and the Army Commander later reported that in the course of the morning the troops on the bridgehead had repulsed 16 counterattacks. By the time we arrived, 12 infantry battalions with machine-guns, mortars and several 45-mm guns had crossed to the

western bank. Taking advantage of the shortage of artillery on the bridgehead, the enemy tried to wear down our troops with panzer attacks, but our aircraft helped the infantry beat them back.

The fighting was heavy, the men fought heroically, displaying fortitude, mutual assistance and a passionate determination to win. They repelled all the enemy attacks.

We had an opportunity to see the engineers at work, establishing a crossing. They worked up to their necks in ice-cold water, amidst exploding gun and mortar shells. Death hung continuously over them, but the men, conscious of their duty as soldiers, thought only of how to help their comrades on the western bank and thus hasten the victory. Duty counted with them above all.

I saw commanders and political officers in the fire and smoke of the battle. In that hell they kept calm and level-headed, maintaining organisation and order. They were the right men for the job. Their bravery was an example to their subordinates and won respect. One could feel this everywhere.

For the first time I saw Popov jolted out of his usual phlegmatic calm. He was nervous and fidgety. The reason was that the artillery was unable to neutralise strong enemy positions in the neighbourhood of Greifenhagen, opposite a demolished bridge over the West Oder. Enemy fire from several machine-guns and antitank rocket launchers (Faustpatronen) were preventing our troops from advancing along the dike and using it to bring up artillery and other heavy equipment.

The Army Commander summoned the people responsible for the oversight that had made this possible, and they would most likely have been raked over the coals, had I not interfered and calmed him down. By then a consorted infantry attack supported by attack aircraft had managed to neutralise the enemy. At once the engineers brought their pontoons up to the dike. By the end of the day nine assault and four pontoon crossings and a 50-ton bridge were operating on the East Oder. Six ferries towed by amphibian trucks serviced the West Oder crossings. Artillery, needed by the troops fighting on the bridgehead, began to arrive on the western bank.

Bidding Popov and his assistants farewell and wishing them success (of which there was now no doubt), we left for the Front CP.

We were seriously worried by the course events were taking in the zone of operation of the 49th Army. From the Army Commander's reports we knew that his troops, which had launched the attack together with the 70th Army, had failed to register success. All their attempts to cross the West Oder had been repelled by the enemy.

We had placed great hopes in the 49th Army. Its task was to co-operate with the right-flank troops of the First Byelorussian Front, which had begun the offensive earlier, and deliver a cleaving blow against the enemy, throwing units of his 3rd Panzer Army to the north and northwest, where they were to be engaged by the 70th Army. In view of the importance of the task, the 49th had received more reinforcements than the others. And now Grishin was marking time.

We analysed the causes of the setback. The main one was a mistake of the Army reconnaissance. On this sector the flooded island between the two channels was severed by many canals, one of which the scouts had mistaken for the main stream of the West Oder. As a consequence, all the artillery fire had been converged on the bank of this canal, held by minor enemy forces. When our infantry crossed the canal and reached the West Oder they were met by fierce enemy fire and were unable to force a crossing.

Grishin took steps to prepare a new strike and requested permission to resume the assault on April 21. Having in mind that if he halted the attack, the enemy would be able to transfer forces from this sector to those where we were successful, I ordered Grishin to resume the offensive in the morning.

The mistake of the 49th Army's Command in determining the line of departure for their advance echelon was a bitter lesson to us. It was especially humiliating as the Army HQ had aerial photographs of the whole zone of the attack. Of course, some of the blame rested with the Front Command, as we had evidently slipped up in checking the Army's readiness for the operation. I need hardly speak of Grishin's feelings. We all felt awkward and embarrassed, each one asking himself how it could have happened and where he personally had slipped up. Such self-criticism can be very helpful, and I felt reassured that my comrades would not let a thing like that happen again.

In taking the decision to continue the offensive on Grishin's sector, we worked out an alternative plan in case he again

failed to gain a foothold on the western bank. In that case a number of the Army's support units would be rushed to Batov and Popov. We had envisaged the possibility of such a regrouping in the course of the operation and studied and prepared the routes, so no snags were expected.

When we got down to reviewing the results of the first day of fighting they proved to be smaller than we had hoped for. Still, the two left-flank armies had gained firm footholds on the western bank of the West Oder, on some sectors wedging into the enemy defences up to two kilometres. The greatest success had been registered in the 65th Army's zone. Fighting to expand the bridgeheads in breadth and depth continued all night. More and more troops were ferried over, and our position there improved.

The fighting had been greatly supported by the 4th Air Army, which had made 3,260 sorties that day. Our superiority in the air was obvious, enemy aircraft restricting itself to reconnaissance flights, and during the whole day we spotted only 69 enemy planes, 10 of which were shot down.

In the night enemy planes tried to destroy the bridges being built by our engineers with torpedoes and floating mines. In the 70th Army zone enemy divers sent to blow up the crossings were caught.

All night Vershinin's bombers, notably the Women's Regiment, struck at the forward lines of the enemy defence opposite the 49th Army's sector.

On April 21, bitter fighting continued all along our front. In Batov's zone the enemy brought up the fresh 281st Infantry Division which, according to POW reports, had been heading for the Berlin sector but was recalled and thrown into the battle at Kurow, taken by the 65th Army.

So far on all sectors we were still no more than nibbling at the enemy defence and our forces were inadequate for a decisive strike from the bridgeheads. The enemy sensed this and tried to push us back into the river. In vain! Our gallant soldiers refused to retreat one step. On the contrary, they made use of every opportunity to enlarge the sections they held.

On the sector where the success was greatest—Batov's—we deployed two motorised pontoon battalions with their rear services, which had initially been earmarked for the 49th Army. By evening we had a 30-ton and a 50-ton bridges and a 50-ton ferry on the East Oder in Batov's zone.

On the West Oder, six ferry crossings were functioning, including two large 16-ton ferries.

The 70th Army's success was somewhat less, but its forces had also managed to widen their bridgehead, in particular they had taken a copse north of Pargow which was of great importance. They had also destroyed an important enemy strong point that had kept a dike used to transport troops and materiel over a marshy stretch under fire. New crossings had been established on the West Oder, where 13 assault and five ferry crossings were now in operation. This made it possible to transport nine more battalions and, what was especially important, divisional artillery in the course of one day.

Forces of the 49th Army had gained a shaky foothold on the West Oder western bank, and the whole day passed in fighting to hold the few small bridgeheads with the enemy counterattacking continuously. As progress here was poor, we did our best to pin down as many enemy forces as possible, using the crossings of the 70th Army on the right to transport the main forces. The Front reinforcing means attached to the 49th were transferred to Batov and Popov. In other words, we decided to shift the main attack to the right flank.

On April 22, units of the 65th Army advanced on some sectors up to two kilometres, taking several villages the enemy had turned into defence centres. Enemy resistance, far from decreasing, continued to mount. In spite of this, however, all the Army's infantry formations, an antitank artillery brigade and a mortar regiment were transported to the other bank. In the evening a 60-ton floating bridge was towed up and, during the night, moored across the West Oder. This was a great achievement, as now we could transport all our heavy machines to the bridgehead.

The 70th Army also continued to transfer its troops to the western bank in a steady stream. Our forces, repelling fierce counterattacks, forced the enemy back step by step, advancing up to three kilometres in the course of the day. Eleven battalions were transferred to the western bank of the West Oder.

In spite of unfavourable weather, planes of the 4th Air Army did everything to help the troops on the bridgeheads. They carried out 3,020 sorties in 24 hours, 1,745 in support of the 65th Army. Their bold actions helped the ground forces on many critical occasions, especially in repelling

panzer attacks (there was still not much antitank artillery on the bridgeheads).

As a result of bitter fighting our bridgehead on the western bank increased to 24 kilometres in width and three kilometres in depth, creating more favourable conditions for the troops to cross.

The main trouble was that the heavy machines could be transported across the flood valley only along undamaged causeways and dikes, and there were no more than two of them in each Army zone. This slowed down the tempo of our advance, all the more so as the enemy kept these bottlenecks under artillery fire. It was imperative to throw him back from the river to a distance that would rule out aimed fire at the crossings.

The Front Military Council, Political Department, arm and service chiefs concentrated on solving this task. We were keenly aware of the value of every gun transferred to the bridgehead and did all we could to get as many over as possible.

By April 25, units of the 65th and 70th Armies, bolstered by Front reinforcements, had advanced up to 8 kilometres, though Batov had been compelled to deploy a portion of his troops facing north against the enemy's Stettin group. To help him, we got Fedyuninsky to speed up the transfer of two of his corps to the bridgehead, assigning him the 65th Army's right-flank crossings.

The 70th Army reached the line Radechow, Petershagen, Gartz, and Popov transferred his Army reserve—an infantry corps—to the western bank. In the evening, the 3rd Guards Tank Corps moved to the bridgehead, and now the 49th Army began to bring up its main forces.

The army commanders were in excellent spirits: they held a bridgehead that was already 35 by 15 kilometres. Soon the troops would break through the enemy defences. The most difficult part was already behind. The soldiers were keen to go on, and we began to think in terms of a speedy penetration of the enemy defence line on the River Randow, without stopping for extensive regrouping, making utmost use of Vershinin's aircraft. We subordinated all the tank corps to the army commanders and gave them a free hand in deciding how best to achieve their objectives. The main thing was to prevent the enemy from holding on to the second defence line.

Just as dawn began to break the nazis resumed their

counterattacks all along the front of our strike group, throwing a substantial part of their reserves into action: units of the SS 103rd Brigade, the 171st Antitank Brigade and the 549th Infantry Division from the neighbourhood of Stettin, the 1st Marine Division from Stolp in the First Byelorussian Front's zone, and the Friedrich Tank Destroyer Brigade, armed almost completely with Faustpatronen. and reinforced with a battalion of assault guns.

But it was too late. By this time we had built up sufficient forces on the western bank of the West Oder to deal with the enemy, notably three corps of the 65th Army—Alexeyev's, Erastov's and Chuvakov's, all fine, seasoned commanders. Side by side with them fought two corps of Popov's army, with a third one ready to plunge into the battle. The 3rd Guards Tank Corps and 1st Don Guards Tank Corps, headed by those talented generals A. P. Panfilov and M. F. Panov, were completing the crossing.

All enemy counterattacks were repulsed and the troops of the 65th and 70th Armies continued to widen the gap. The only result of the enemy's counterattacks was the weakening of his forces, as he had suffered heavy casualties and made it possible for our troops to storm his fortifications hot on the heels of his fleeing soldiers.

By evening of April 25, the enemy defence had been breached on a 20-km frontage and our forces had approached the River Randow. As a result of the fighting on the western bank of the Oder, not only the units defending the line, but all the reserves brought up by the enemy had been completely routed.

Meanwhile the First Byelorussian Front, our neighbour on the left, was already engaging the enemy in Berlin, the formations on its right flank enveloping the German capital from the north. Our offensive prevented the enemy from transferring reserves to Berlin and thereby contributed to our neighbour's success.

With the Oder behind us, our Front proceeded to execute a manoeuvre with the purpose of enveloping the main forces of the 3rd Panzer Army from the south and southwest, depriving them of any possibility, not only of assisting the Berlin group, but of retreating to the west as well. The 65th Army and the 1st Guards Tank Corps received the task of striking northwest and locking up the enemy troops operating northeast of the line Stettin, Neubrandenburg, Rostock along the coast.

The 2nd Strike Army was to advance with two corps in the general direction of Anklam, Stralsund, while part of its forces mopped up the enemy on Usedom and Rügen islands. Fedyuninsky was instructed to keep in close contact with Batov, though, knowing him as a seasoned, experienced soldier, I did not doubt that he himself would see to effective co-ordination with his neighbours. In view of the difficulty of his task, we gave him the 19th Army's 40th Guards Infantry Corps.

The 70th Army and the 3rd Guards Tank Corps advanced in the general direction of Warren, Krakow, Wismar.

The 49th Army, the 8th Mechanised Corps and Oslikovsky's 3rd Guards Cavalry Corps, continued to carry out their original task of forging due west to the Elbe.

Now Romanovsky's 19th Army was starting to move with the object of advancing along the coast towards Swinemunde and on to Greifswald.

On April 26, troops of the 65th Army carried Stettin by storm, broke through the enemy defences on the River Randow and headed northwest.

In an attempt to halt them, the nazi command pulled up fresh reserves: the so-called Ost See Battle Group, an officers' school and the 1st Marine Division. These forces, joined by units of the 50th SS Police Brigade and remnants of the reserve 610th Division, undertook desperate counter-attacks. All of them were routed, incurred heavy losses, but failed to stop us.

The enemy kept giving his troops more and more bombastic names: "Ost See", "Vistula", "Pomerania", "Wallonie".... To no avail. Names alone are not enough.

Popov's forces broke through the defences on the River Randow and, overwhelming the enemy, continued to advance. Units of the 70th Army routed three Volkssturm battalions: "Hamburg", "Brandenburg" and "Greifenhagen".

Grishin's army reached its peak fighting strength. Using the crossings of the 70th Army, it had its main forces ferried to the other bank and, striking at the flank and rear of the enemy troops holding the sector, inflicted a heavy defeat.

The fighting on April 26 continued as fiercely as ever. The enemy brought up more and more reserves, including the hastily activated battalions named after the cities that raised them. These, however, were the death throes. Like a mortally wounded beast that continues to snap back in the

madness of despair, so the nazis continued to fight to the last. They still cherished the hope of holding out till the British and Americans arrived, and surrendering to them rather than to the Soviet Army. This was the most they could count on and they fought with the ferocity of suicides.

Heroism was displayed throughout our armies. Our men were impelled by the one desire—not to give the enemy a moment's respite and finish him off as swiftly as possible. Side by side with the infantry went the artillerymen, blazing the way with large-calibre guns that shattered enemy strong points and the celebrated *katyusha* rocket launchers that literally swept away the counterattacking nazis.

Vershinin's airmen struck at approaching enemy reserves and resistance centres and gave our troops cover from the air.

Our Command Post moved to Stettin. Until now we had kept control over our troops mainly from observation posts located 2.5 to 4 kilometres behind the forward units on the most important sectors. I should like to mention the valour and devotion of our signallers. The Front and Army command always had excellent communication with their formations and units.

The troops of the First Byelorussian Front executed a turning movement on the right flank, enveloping Berlin from the north and linking up with units of the First Ukrainian Front to the west of the capital. The enemy's Berlin group was trapped. In heavy fighting Soviet troops advanced towards the centre of the city.

In this situation it was important to forestall any attempt to relieve the plight of the Berlin group by a strike from the north. We possessed information that the nazis were transporting troops from the Samland peninsula and Hel spit in the Gulf of Danzig by sea. Accordingly, we concentrated our attention on the 49th Army, advancing westward with the 8th Mechanised and 3rd Guards Cavalry Corps. They were to cut off the nazi units heading for Berlin and throw them back to the north, within reach of the 70th Army.

On April 27, the offensive continued. The 2nd Strike Army cleared Gristow Island, its right flank approaching Swinemünde. Its main forces, operating along the southern shore of Stettin Harbour, advanced on Anklam, Stralsund. On the way they routed units of the Stettin garrison and the 4th Regiment Pomerania that had been defending the line north of Stettin.

The offensive of all armies of the Front developed successfully. After April 27 the enemy was no longer capable of holding any line and we began a rapid pursuit of his fleeing units, which, however, lost no opportunity to snap back.

The retreating enemy demolished bridges, mined and destroyed roads and attempted to give battle in every town and village suitable for defence. Nevertheless, our rate of advance was about 25-30 kilometres a day. Sweeping aside all barriers and annihilating resisting enemy forces, our troops advanced irresistibly. Soon Fedyuninsky's 2nd Strike Army and Batov's 65th, advancing in a northwestern direction, destroying retreating enemy units and taking many prisoners, reached the Baltic coast.

Popov's 70th Army and Grishin's 49th encountered enemy reserves deployed in the forested lake area of Neustrelitz, Warren, Fürstenberg. Units of the 7th Panzer Division transported by sea from the Gulf of Danzig, the 102nd Special Division and the Schlageter Infantry Division from the High Command's Reserve, the 5th Paratroop Division from the Western front and remnants of the 25th Motorised, 5th Light Infantry, 3rd Marine, 156th Infantry and 606th Special Divisions and a Volksgrenadier artillery formation that had retreated under the blows of the First Byelorussian Front's right wing, tried to dig in here. All these enemy units were routed, destroyed and the remnants taken prisoner by Popov's and Grishin's forces in co-operation with Panfilov's tank corps, the 8th Mechanised Corps and Vershinin's aircraft. The 49th and 70th Armies' advance continued ceaselessly.

On May 3, Panfilov's 3rd Guards Tank Corps established contact with advance units of the British 2nd Army southwest of Wismar.

On May 4, units of the 70th and 49th Armies, 8th Mechanised and 3rd Guards Cavalry Corps reached the demarcation line with the Allied forces (the cavalry reached the Elbe). Units of Romanovsky's 19th and Fedyuninsky's 2nd Strike Army continued in action another day, mopping up the nazis on Wollin, Usedom and Rügen islands. Their seizure marked the end of the Second Byelorussian Front's offensive operation, though mopping-up continued in some areas where small groups of nazis remained in the rear.

We had some trouble with the Danish Island of Bornholm, which the nazi command had turned into a naval

base and transit point for rescuing troops, trapped on the Hel spit, in the Gulf of Danzig area and isolated pockets in Kurland, and taking them abroad. The commander of the German forces on the island, General Wuthman, and his naval deputy, Commodore von Kemetz, rejected our ultimatum for surrender. We decided to force a landing. Two infantry divisions of the 19th Army embarked. I ordered General P. I. Kotov-Legonkov, Chief of the Front Operations Department, to organise the landing. He was assisted by the commander of the Kolberg naval base. Subsequently we had our hands full supplying food and other necessities to the forces landed on Bornholm. The Baltic was infested with mines laid by both Germans and the Allies. There was no documentation, and mine-sweeping of roadsteads had only just begun. Every trip to the island entailed a considerable risk.

On Bornholm more than 12,000 German officers and men were disarmed and taken prisoner and large supplies captured. From the outset cordial relations were established between the Danish population and our troops. The inhabitants gave the liberators a tumultuous welcome, and all the time our troops remained on the island they enjoyed the love and respect of the whole population.

We were in Germany. Around us were the wives and children, the fathers and mothers of those who only yesterday had fought against us with arms in hand. Only a short while ago these people had fled in panic as soon as they heard that Soviet troops were approaching. Now no one fled. Everyone could see for himself the falsity of the nazi propaganda. They realised that there was no need to fear the Soviet soldier. He would do no harm. On the contrary, he would protect the weak and help the poor. Fascism had brought the people shame, misfortune and moral degradation in the eyes of all mankind. But the Soviet soldier was humane and noble, and would extend a helping hand to all the blinded and misled. The Germans realised this very soon. Wherever our units halted, the field kitchens were surrounded by crowds of hungry German children. Then the adults approached. They knew that Soviet soldiers would share all they had with true Russian generosity and the ready sympathy of people who have gone through many trials and learned to understand and value life.

A SOLDIER'S HAPPINESS

I made a tour of inspection of the troops, deployed now over a vast territory from the Baltic coast to the suburbs of Berlin.

At dawn I headed for Popov's 70th Army Headquarters. The road passed through a thick forest. Suddenly a column of soldiers in familiar dark-green uniforms blocked the road. Germans! Involuntarily I reached for my pistol. But then I related. The war was over! To disguise my first impulse I put my hand into my pocket and brought out a cigarette case.

The column halted to let our car pass. Hundreds of German eyes looked at us, some curiously, most with vacant indifference. How different they had once been. Flushed with victory, they had marched through the cities of Europe and plundered captive nations. Their trail across our land was one of blood, ashes and ruins. They had prided themselves on their invincibility and succeeded in convincing many others of it, until they came to grips with our soldier. Then there had been the fighting at Moscow, Stalingrad, Kursk, the Dnieper, Warsaw, the Oder and the Elbe. Now nothing remained of the former might of Hitler's army. Only columns of prisoners: bewildered, depressed men in shabby green uniforms, many of them for the first time seriously stopping to reflect and beginning to see the light. Let them, let them reflect more and deeper! Defeat might also serve a useful purpose, it could teach people lessons and make even the most narrow-minded take a sober look at life and grasp the measure of their guilt and the measure of their responsibility before history.

The officer in command of the Soviet soldiers escorting the prisoners reported their destination. The car drove on past what seemed to be an endless column.

So recently they had all been armed. What efforts and sacrifices it had taken to knock the weapons out of their hands and overthrow the nazi regime that had sent them

forth to kill, enslave and plunder! This had been done by us, soldiers of the Land of Soviets.

My heart swelled with a feeling of pride for our soldiers, for our people who, in a titanic struggle, had succeeded in forcing the enemy to his knees. Pride for belonging to this giant people and pride that a grain of my effort had also contributed to the victory. This was not smugness. Oh, no, it was precisely a feeling of pride.

Not only depressing columns of prisoners snaked along the roads of Germany. Real human joy also seethed and surged on those roads. Crowds of people hailed us with elated shouts, hailed us in many languages of the world. Our hearts missed a beat at the sight of this human sea, this conglomerate of races. People in rags, terribly emaciated, many scarcely able to stand and clinging to each other for support. But there was joy in all eyes.

These were yesterday's prisoners of the nazi concentration camps. People who had been destined to die. And we Soviet soldiers had liberated them and returned them to life.

Here were people driven to Germany from all countries of Europe. Slaves with no rights whatsoever, they had been doomed to toil for their oppressors until they collapsed from starvation, disease and exhaustion. Now they were free people again, returning to their homes and families, and they were grateful to us, Soviet soldiers, for this.

There were people of every conceivable nationality: Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Poles, Czechs, Serbians, Montenegrins, Frenchmen, Belgians—it is hard to name them all. It is harder still to describe their delight, their joy, their boundless gratitude expressed in words, gestures, looks and abundant tears of joy. They greeted us with songs in their native languages, with flags and posters announcing their country. In many languages people warmly expressed their appreciation of the exploit of Soviet soldiers, proclaimed slogans in honour of the Soviet Union. These moving incidents impressed themselves on my memory forever.

There were also many French, British, American, Belgian, Dutch officers and men taken prisoner by the nazis at different times. Most of them appeared to be former airmen. Among the liberated soldiers there was even the former Chief of the General Staff of the Belgian Army with a large group of generals and officers.

In addition to its routine affairs, the Front Military Council was swamped with a host of new problems. We had

to take upon ourselves the care for tens of thousands of people liberated from fascist slavery. Later we received scores and hundreds of letters from governments and organisations with words of warm gratitude for the liberation of their compatriots and the care they had been given.

On May 8, the instrument of complete, unconditional surrender of all nazi Germany's armed forces was signed.

The men's enthusiasm defies description. Shots rang out, men fired all kinds of weapons into the air, our men joining with our Allies to express the joy that surged within them. That night I drove into the city where our headquarters was located. Suddenly bright lights went on in the streets and windows blazed brightly. It was so sudden that I was at a loss. Only after a little while did I realise that this was the end of the blackout. The war was over! And only then did I realise the meaning of the endless rattle of shots. It was time to put an end to the spontaneous salute. I ordered the shooting to be stopped.

General A. P. Panfilov, whose 3rd Guards Tank Corps had been the first to contact the British forces, handed me an invitation from Field Marshal Montgomery. On the following day, accompanied by a group of generals and officers, I drove to Wismar. We were met outside the city by British officers in plain battle dress, only wearing berets instead of helmets. After a brief ceremony of greeting they accompanied us to their Commander-in-Chief's quarters. I felt that the British were trying to make the meeting as warm as possible, and we reciprocated in kind.

A guard of honour was lined up to greet us. I shook hands with Field Marshal Montgomery, and we exchanged congratulations on our victory. With punctilious adherence to etiquette the British fired an artillery salute. After the ceremony, our generals and officers mingled freely with the British and lively conversations sprang up with interpreters and without them. Montgomery was very animated and unconstrained, in tune with the general mood.

Naturally, there were photographers, artists and correspondents—too many, if anyone asked me. However, it was hardly surprising, as this was the first meeting between two leading commanders of our Allied armies after four years of bloody war against our common enemy, nazi Germany.

When we had rubbed shoulders for a while, Montgomery invited us into a hall where drinks and refreshments had

been served, but both hosts and guests were at first too engrossed in their conversations to notice them.

Photographers took pictures of Montgomery and myself at a map on the wall; more pictures were taken all around, in groups and singly.

The party went off well, and we left in the best of spirits. The British officers and Montgomery himself turned out to be much simpler and convivial than we had imagined. We parted warmly and were seen off by the officers who had met us, headed by General Bowls, commander of an airborne division.

We reciprocated this kind invitation and invited Field Marshal Montgomery and his comrades-in-arms to visit us. The reception, we decided, was to be given with genuine Russian hospitality.

We mounted a guard of honour made up of Kuban Cossacks from Oslikovsky's 3rd Guards Cavalry Corps and in full Cossack uniform. This created a great impression on Montgomery and his officers, and for a long time the British watched the prancing horsemen as they rode away. After the greeting ceremony, the guests were invited to a large hall where a sumptuous feast was served. Sitting at the food-laden table (the British had given a standing cocktail party) our guests felt much better. The conversation became very friendly. Montgomery, who had at first intimated that the visit would have to be a fairly short one, stopped looking at his watch and readily joined the general conversation.

The reception wound up with a concert by our Front ensemble. I must say that we had a fine ensemble, and this was the culminating event that completely won over the Britishers' hearts. They greeted every number with such furious clapping and ovations that the walls shook. Montgomery was for some time unable to find words to express his admiration.

It was late at night when the Field Marshal and his officers finally bid us a warm, cordial farewell.

This meeting was a truly memorable occasion. It filled us with confidence that people of different countries, speaking different languages and even adhering to different ideologies could, given the desire, live in friendship and respect each other.

Our soldiers were triumphant. I looked at their excited faces and rejoiced together with them.

Victory! A soldier's greatest happiness is the realisation that he has helped his people to overcome the enemy, to uphold his country's freedom and bring it peace. The realisation that you have performed your duty, the grim yet inspiring duty of a soldier, that which there is nothing higher on earth.

The enemy who had attempted to enslave the peoples of a socialist state was defeated.

Our country had lived through grim years. This had been a war in which the nation's fate, the life of each and all of us had hung in the balance. Soviet people had realised this, and at the call of the Party they had risen as one man to uphold their Soviet social and state system, all their revolutionary gains. It had become a truly people's war.

Our socialist state proved stronger than nazi Germany.

In the mortal struggle that had begun in highly unfavourable conditions for our country, the greatness and inviolable unity of the Soviet people, their boundless love for their country and devotion to the ideals of Lenin had displayed themselves in full measure. The people understood and accepted the policy of the Communist Party as their own and supported it to the end.

Once again the truth of Lenin's immortal words had been vindicated that never will a nation be conquered in which the majority of the workers and peasants have felt and seen that they are upholding their own Soviet government—the government of the working people, that they are upholding a cause the triumph of which will ensure them and their children the possibility of enjoying all the benefits of culture, all the achievements of human endeavour.

In the crucible of trials the soldiers of the Soviet Army had displayed their boundless devotion to their people, their Government and Party. Every one of us had firmly remembered the Party's slogan: "Our cause is just, victory will be ours!" Confidence in victory never left us, even in moments of crisis of which there were many.

Devotion and love for the people and the state system were displayed in countless exploits on the field of battle. Millions became heroes. Soldiers stood to the death, to the last ditch, closed the embrasures of enemy pillboxes with their bodies, airmen and tankmen did not hesitate to ram their adversaries if the situation demanded. They were all heroes: those who went into the attack under a hail of fire, those who built bridges under a barrage of shells, those who

laid telephone lines to the command posts. Glory to you, great Soviet people. I am happy to have been with you all those years. And if I succeeded in accomplishing anything, it was thanks to you.

Our army matured and gained strength in battle. A fine force of commanders and political workers grew up. The tactical and strategic leadership of the Armed Forces constantly improved.

In the years of the grave danger that loomed over our country the whole Soviet people rallied still closer around the Communist Party and Soviet Government. The valour of the men at the front was supplemented and inspired by the heroic work exploits of the workers, peasants and intellectuals, of our brave women and youth. It was they, the millions of tireless toilers, who had forged the weapons for the front, fed and clothed the soldiers, warmed them with their concern and the warmth of their hearts.

The Communist Party, the leading and guiding force of the Soviet society, vanguard of the Soviet people, tried and tested in battle, was the soul and inspirer of the national struggle.

The Great Patriotic War was a people's war, and the victory over the enemy was the people's. The army and the people celebrated it as one united family, and this realisation added infinitely to our soldier's happiness.